UNIT 1 INTRODUCTING CONTEMPORARY INDIAN THEATRE

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

Unit 1 aims to provide you with essential background information about contemporary Indian theatre and also about Kannada drama. This will help you to get an idea of the major trends in post-independence theatre and also enable you to put the prescribed play in a proper perspective. It will also help you to approach the text with fuller confidence.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The cultural renaissance of the post-Independence years gave a fillip to theatre all over India and saw the birth of a new tradition in Indian theatre. Folk, traditional and classical theatre forms already had their own seasonal, ritual or entertainment bases in their respective regions. They took their narratives from Indian mythology and fell broadly into a song-dance-prose format. Costumes and make-up were wildly vivid, acting styles oratorical, and performance spaces informal, having their place within the community's public spaces. The new theatre, which came into being with the country's thrust towards modernity, was powered by the dream of building a nation founded on democratic and secular principles.

India's first acquaintance with formal dramatic literature came in the middle of the nineteenth century with the opening of Universities in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Pune. The youth in Universities were introduced, on the one hand, to the works of Shakespeare, and on the other, to their own Sanskrit dramatists: Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Shudraka, Narayana Bhatta, and others. Aspiring dramatists in the regional languages received apprenticeship by translating, adapting, and emulating Shakespeare and Sanskrit dramatists

There was in 1930's a surge both for modernity and indigenous cultural identity. Symbolic of this time was perhaps the fact that while on the one hand, Le Corbusier was invited to design and create the modernist city of Chandigarh, on the other, the Central Academies of the arts endorsed a so-called return to roots by encouraging the folk and the classical traditions with their patronage. A society setting out to re-mint itself as a coin with two heads facing opposite sides, one looking forward towards modernity, the other turned backward towards indigenous cultural identity, found itself trapped between two dramatic modes: While the realism of Ibsen allowed dramatists to deal with the social and moral problems of an emergent society, the folk and traditional theatre appeared to offer the only cultural roots which the largely urban dramatists and directors could see.

Those who sought state patronage for theatre with an eye on the foreign market, chose the colour, song and dance of folk traditions. European theatre too was turning to the East for its rich theatrical resources, branding its products with the highly-valorized epithet "intercultural". In regions like Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, and Maharashtra, however, where a strong, unbroken theatre tradition had been in place for over a hundred years by the time the country won its independence, the people had the decisive voice on what kind of theatre would be done: for they, not the State, were the patrons of the theatre.

1.2 GROWTH OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN THEATRE

It is very difficult to capture the history of contemporary Indian theatre in a single frame, for the simple reason that there is no single history. Each region has evolved its own way of moving forward while looking back. One can only hope to indicate the whys and hows of these moves, by looking at the thinking and work of some of the most significant practitioners of theatre in the country since Independence.

The history of modern theatre in India begins with Shombhu Mitra, who had achieved legendary status during his lifetime. Fascinated with theatre from his boyhood years, he entered the professional state in Calcutta at the age of twenty-four. Disenchanted with the profit-motivated selection of plays, ornate props, and painted scenery, Mitra quit the scene.

By the thirties, the professional theatre had begun to decline. It made very little sense at a time of global and local upheavals: World War II, the birth of the Azad Hind Force, the bombing of Calcutta, the manmade Bengal famine of 1943, the Naval Mutiny of 1945, and the communal riots of 1946, followed by the brutal killings during the partition of the country in which Bengal suffered a gash straight through the heart. These were the horrors, which were drastically changing people's perception of human life.

It was in response to this, that Mitra joined the 'Indian People's Theatre Association' (IPTA) in the early forties and directed Bijon Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* [The New Harvest, Bengali, 1944)] about the Bengal famine in 1944. This play was a radical departure from any that had been written and staged until then. The use of space and lighting, the style of speech and acting, even the use of a dialect in stage speech were all new, breaking and reforming the known language of theatre. With Nabanna, Mitra became the father of modern Indian theatre. In 1948, he set up his own group, Bohurupee, launching Bengal's group theatre movement.

Of all the plays he directed and acted in until his retirement from theatre in the mid-eighties, the one that was hailed throughout the country was Tagore's *Raktakarabi* (1954). In a tribute to Mitra on his 77th birth anniversary (Probe India, August 1992), senior director Habib Tanvir said, "I have had the chance to see many different productions of Tagore's plays, but I feel that no other director has been able to give form to their 'feelings' except Mitra….. his play has had a profound impact on the theatre of the entire country".

Unlike Shombhu Mitra, Utpal Dutt (1929-1993) declared himself a leftist political playwright. He too joined IPTA in the middle of his career, which had begun with English plays. Whereas Mitra was committed to new theatre which concerned itself with the aesthetics of theatre, its verbal, acting and production language, Dutt was committed to "people's theatre", and was concerned with using every theatrical means to awaken people to their condition.

Dutt's *Angar* (1939), about a recent coalmine disaster, was the first play he wrote, directed, and produced. His earlier plays had been either translations/adaptations of Western classics or modern works, or Bengali plays written largely by earlier writers like Rabindranath Tagore and Michael Madhusudan Dutt. *Angar* was also the first play to be staged at Minerva, a professional theatre, which for the first time was filled to capacity without the enticement of song and dance. What Dutt had given the audience, instead, was 'spectacle' – the coalmine setting, the struggle of the miners, and the deliberate flooding of the mines by the authorities.

Dutt continued to stage his political plays on the professional stage until the end of the sixties, when political exigencies forced other choices on him. The upsurge of the Naxalbari movement, supported by China, brought daily violence to Bengal. During the decade, Dutt wrote and directed nearly twenty plays for the popular Jatra theatre. With these plays, he accelerated the hesitant entry of politics into the Jatra repertoire.

The Little Theatre Group, which Dutt formed after parting ways with IPTA, succumbed to internal ideological differences and betrayals. As resilient as ever, Dutt formed the People's Little Theatre. Dutt's first major production for the new group was *Tiner Talwar* (1971). Hailed countrywide by critics and theatre lovers alike for its intelligent use of melodrama, the rich nuances of its verbal text, and its bold use of theatre machinery which had been cast aside by the realists of the new theatre, *Tiner Talwar* was theatre speaking about itself. Accounting for the extraordinary power of this non-political play, Dutt said in an interview with theatre scholar Samik Bandopadhyay, "*Tiner Talwar*… was a statement with which all our actors and actresses had identified themselves. That is how the teamwork and the sincerity of the actors came through so powerfully".

If an exact contrast is to be sought for Utpal Dutt, one finds it in Badal Sircar. He forms the third point of the Calcutta theatre triangle of the sixties and seventies. A civil engineer and town planner by training, Sircar went to the USA with a Jawaharlal Nehru Research Fellowship in 1972, to work on a theatre of synthesis as a rural-urban link.

Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* [And Indrajit] (1962), became one of the most widely translated and performed plays of the late sixties. At the very time, however, when he was being hailed as the new voice of the middle-class, he was questioning himself about whether he wanted to be just that. This self-questioning finally led to his giving up the proscenium theatre altogether and committing himself to what he called the Third Theatre, the first two being the middle-class urban and the folk. Since its inception, Sircar's Third Theatre has been an inspiration for many theatre movements all over the country.

Whereas Dutt had proclaimed that political theatre should be performed on every platform available, including the proscenium and the Jatra stage, Badal Sircar was convinced that the nature of the performing space was implicated in the language of theatre and must be chosen to help create that language. In the seventies, Badal Sircar and his group, Shatabdi, stepped out of the proscenium frame and into an ordinary assembly hall to play to an audience sitting on benches on three sides of the performing space. This enabled an intimate dialogue to be conducted between the players and the audience, allowing the latter to become participants in the "reality" of the performance. This was different from their normal role of passively accepting the fabrication of reality that was offered to them on the proscenium stage. The Third Theatre, minus auditorium, costumes, lights, make-up, freed Sircar from the need for media support and from the need to sell his "product". His audience was free to walk in and pay donation if they so desired.

Sircar's best-known and most widely staged play, *Michhil*, was first performed in April 1974 in village Ramchadrapur in West Bengal; his second play, *Bhoma* was first performed in March 1976 in village Ramgabelia in West Bengal; his third play, Baki Itihas [The Rest of History, 1965] was first performed in July 1979 at the Calcutta Theosophical Society Hall.

1.3 THEATRE IN BENGAL

The time of the giants was over. Some theatre practitioners who continue to redefine theatre in Bengal and have been acknowledged on the national level are Rudraprasad Sengupta, Shyamanand Jalan, Probir Guha, and Usha Ganguli. I shall briefly describe here the work of Guha and Ganguli.

Probir Guha's Living Alternative Theatre is, in a sense, an offshoot of Badal Sircar's movement. Based in the industrial town of Khardah, 20 km from Calcutta, the group puts itself directly in touch with the audience through plays that reflect the daily impact of social, economic and political forces on the people. His actors and actresses are socially committed volunteers. Guha believes in fostering positive violence in the bodies of his actors. Towards this end, they are trained in various Indian martial arts systems. In a paper presented at the international seminar, Actor at Work, organized at the National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA), Mumbai, in November 1991, Guha said of his theatre,

> 'I find my themes from happenings and encounters that occur only too often on the streets, in the slums, in train compartments, in village hutments, in workplaces and worksites... I pick these situations up, re-mould them to a point of shock and present them to the public. There

is a desire to create a violent effect on the audience so that their complaisance cracks and they discover themselves'.

Despite doing plays in Hindi, Usha Ganguli has managed, over the last twenty-one years of work with her group Rangkarmee, to acquire a large following in Calcutta and elsewhere in Bengal and the rest of the country. A trained Bharat Natyam dancer, she began her career with a group that performed for the richer section of the Hindi-speaking population of Calcutta. This did not satisfy her either ideologically or aesthetically. She realized she wanted to do more consciously committed plays that would reach out to schoolteachers, students, clerks, and housewives — anybody.

Rangkarmee was formed in January 1976. Its members came from all walks of life, but their continuance with the group depended on whether they were willing to be theatre workers as the group name demanded or whether they were there only for the limelight. Those who stayed dedicated themselves to doing socially relevant plays. They were given rigorous training in acting, management, and back-stage work. Over the two decades and more of the group's existence, each of its present repertoires of half-a-dozen plays had had at least a hundred shows.

The most celebrated Rangkarmee production is *Rudali* (1993), based on Maheshweta Devi's short story about professional women mourners in Bihar. The script for the stage evolved through workshops, which included well-known writers, Ganguli her-self, and one of the members of Rangkarmee. Ascetically mounted, without set, lights or music, and performed in the naturalistic style with Usha Ganguli playing the main role, the play has travelled all over India and brought acclaim from critics and audiences alike.

1.4 THEATRE IN MAHARASHTRA

In Bengal, there is a tradition of writer-directors; indeed, of directors who have written in order to do the kind of theatre they want to do. In Maharashtra, on the other hand, there is a strong playwriting tradition in which the playwright is not necessarily directly associated with the brasstacks of theatre. Therefore, when we come to theatre in Maharashtra, it is only right that we should begin with playwrights who have been responsible for changing the language of modern Marathi theatre.

When Vijay Tendulkar (b. 1928) began writing, the new theatre movement in Mumbai was just gaining popularity. Young people, mostly collegians, were raring to put an end to the earlier song-and-declamation and later sentiment-and-diluted social commentaries and to replace them with theatrical expressions relevant to their own times. Tendulkar was in the vanguard of this movement, which included later stars like Vijaya Mehta and Shreeram Lagoo. Unlike most playwrights, Tendulkar was in close touch with the directors, designers, and actors of the stage and was thus able to hone his playwriting craft with their practical comments.

The first Tendulkar play to cross the language barrier was *Shantata*! *Court Chalu Ahe* [Silence! The Court is in Session] (1967), which was staged in Bengali and Hindi. In quick succession thereafter came *Gidhade* [The Vultures] (1971), *Sakharam Binder* [Sakharam The Bookbinder] (1972) and

Ghashiram Kotwal (1973). The latter three plays ran into problems with the censors and/or the public. *Gidhade* offended the sensibilities of the middle-class audience with its portrayal of its protagonists, a middle-class family, as vultures. The censors objected to its abusive language and, amongst other scenes, to one in which the pregnant sister enters in a bloodstained sari after being kicked by her brother causing a miscarriage. The censors objected to the abusive language in *Sakharam Binder* too, while his mistress is beating up the audience protested against the protagonist Sakharam's. *Ghashiram Kotwal* angered historians by its portrayal of Nana Phadnavis, Chancellor to the Peshwa, which they said was historically wrong, while it offended the Pune Brahmins because it depicted the Brahmins of that era as lecherous, greedy, and corrupt. Lust for power, greed, corruption and the consequent violence are the themes which Tendulkar explores through the story of *Ghashiram Kotwal*, the North Indian Brahmin who came to Pune to make his fortune. The Chancellor, who had his eyes on Ghashiram's daughter, gave him unlimited power. Once he tired of her, he cut Ghashiram down brutally.

Ghashiram Kotwal became a *cause celebre* in 1980 when it was scheduled to tour Europe. The Shiv Sena, went to court demanding an injunction on the tour on the plea that it would create a "wrong impression" of the country. The court's decision allowing the play to go came just two days before the troupe was due to leave. They were allowed to go on condition that they would make a declaration before the curtain went up on every show that Nana Phadnavis was a great statesman who fought the British tooth and nail during his Chancellor-ship. Everybody connected with the play lived in terror during those days.

Tendulkar chose to cast his play in the Dashavatar folk form because he was fascinated by the multiple theatrical uses its idea of a human curtain could be put to. In the Dashavatar, the chorus stands in a semi-circle swaying rhythmically and singing its comments on the action. In *Ghashiram*, the chorus was used both to hide and reveal the action in tantalizing, often bitingly ironic ways. Mime, song and dance from folk tradition, and the sutradhar from classical theatre were used to give the play fluidity and create possibilities to take the work beyond the particular into the universal. *Ghashiram Kotwal* was and is a brilliant piece of theatre perfectly amalgamating a modern theme, a contemporary sensibility and the folk theatre form, but it has been held responsible for spawning a progeny, which uses folk elements to decorate their work in a spurious attempt to make it indigenous.

Mahesh Elkunchwar (b. 1939) began writing plays in 1968, after he saw a Tendulkar play which demonstrated how much power the senior playwright's terse, economic, more-left-unsaid-than-said style of dialogue writing held. A lecturer in a Nagpur college, Elkunchwar made his mark with *Holi* (1970) which Vijaya Mehta directed for her group Rangayan, bringing out the brutality of its depiction of campus violence through ragging.

Several of Elkunchwar's plays including *Holi, Pratibimb* (1987), and *Atmakatha* [Autobiography] (1988) have been translated into Hindi, English, and Bengali. His most ambitious work to date has been his trilogy, which traces, through the fortunes of a small town family of Brahmin landlords, the crumbling of the feudal order, the plundering of the countryside by greedy jungle contractors, and a metaphorical reduction of the region to drought and barrenness. The first part of the trilogy, *Wada Chirebandi* [Old Stone Mansion] (1982), was directed for the mainstream stage by Vijaya Mehta in 1985. The play was later expanded into a trilogy called Yuganta [The End of an Age] (1994). The entire trilogy was directed for Awishkar by Chandrakant Kulkarni in 1994 to mark the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Marathi theatre.

Elkunchwar is a confirmed realist. He does not see his roots in folk theatre and would consider it a betrayal of his urban individualism and his Western-oriented sensibility to use folk elements in his plays. *Wada Chirebandi* is one of the finest examples of consummate realism in contemporary Marathi dramatic literature.

Satish Alekar (b. 1949) is a biochemist by training and has recently been appointed Director of the Performing Arts, Department of Pune University. He was one of the young members of the Progressive Dramatic Association who split from the parent group over the decision to stop performing *Ghashiram Kotwal* after the public furore against it. The young members including Alekar, Dr. Jabbar Patel, and Dr. Mohan Agash formed a new group, Theatre Academy, and made *Ghashiram* their first production. Satish Alekar wrote and directed several plays for the Theatre Academy, the most successful being *Mahanirvan* (1974). He wrote the play in the Kirtan form; having grown up in the heart of Pune, this form of musical religious sermon was very close to him. His acute sense of irony found in this form a perfect vehicle for its own subversion. The play is an irreverent look at Hindu death rituals, written with the spontaneous zest and quirky humor that marks all Alekar's works.

Mahanirvan, although a highly successful play, is flawed. It has been translated and produced in Hindi and Bengali. Alekar's finest play to date remains the more difficult and therefore less popular *Begum Barve* (1979). It delves into the real and fantasy worlds of two sets of people — a pair of government clerks, and a female impersonator of the old music theatre days and his employer, a ruthless cripple. *Begum Barve* has been published in English translation but performed, apart from the original Marathi, only in Hindi.

Vijaya Mehta (b. 1934) was one of the pioneers of the new theatre in Mumbai, both as a director and an actress. The first plays she directed were realistic. In those days in the context of the dominant theatre, which was melodramatic, musical, declamatory or sentimental and mushy, realism was seen as a bold experiment. The group of young collegians who collected around her looked up to her for leadership. Together they formed Rangayan in 1954. They were themselves like a theatre laboratory and study group. Every new play they produced was preceded and followed by discussions designed to develop the understanding of theatre by its members and cultivate the taste of the audience for this new realistic theatre. In 1971, the group split. The actor-couple Arvind and Sulabha Deshpande and a few others from the old group, notably organizer Arun Kakade, formed a new group, Awishkar. Their first play was a spectacular production of Karnad's *Tughlaq*, translated into Marathi by Vijay Tendulkar, directed by Arvind Deshpande and designed with a stunning set comprising multiple levels by Damu Kenkre.

Mehta, hurt and disillusioned, joined the mainstream stage, where, along with Shreeram Lagoo she was responsible for introducing a new understated acting style. Although she directed many excellent productions for the mainstream stage, including Jaywant Dalvi's Barrister, which she later made into a film, she could not endure the pressures of touring and the aesthetic compromises of working in the main stream for too long. After quitting the mainstream, Mehta did some visually stunning productions of the classics *Mudrarakshasa* and *Shakuntala*. Bhaskar Chandavarkar composed the music and the artist D.G. Godse designed the sets. She also directed Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* and *Nagmandala* in the mid-eighties.

Although Vijaya Mehta has attempted many forms of theatre including Brecht, and has always done impeccable productions, her forte is still the meticulously planned realistic play where biographies of characters are constructed and the acting graph plotted accordingly. She has been a great team leader and organizer and has been wholly responsible for bringing rigorous professionalism and a serious concern for developing the aesthetics of theatre for the non-professional stage.

Dr. Jabbar Patel is a practicing gynecologist who lives and works in Daund, halfway between Pune and Sholapur. The three plays he has directed for Theatre Academy have all involved large casts, ensemble work, and music. *Ghashiram Kotwal*, under his direction, is by far the most travelled Marathi production of all times. During the twenty-five years that Theatre Academy ran the production, it saw two generation of actors being inducted and trained, although the main role continued to be played by the inimitable Dr. Mohan Agashe as Nana Phadnavis till the production was wound up. Fifty boys were trained to dance and sing and were put through a regimen of exercises to prepare them for *Ghashiram*. Bhaskar Chandavarkar composed the music, a major contribution to the success of the play. So integrated was music, dance, and the prose text that the director had to interact very closely with the composer and the choreographer. The result was a theatrical tour de force very different in character from the naturalistic plays Marathi theatre excelled in. The success of *Ghashiram Kotwal* at the box-office also served to subsidize the Academy's less popular productions like *Begum Barve*.

Patel's next production, *Teen Pashacha Tamasha*, (1977) was P.L. Deshpande's adaptation of Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. This production, while excellently performed and sung by Madhuri Purandare as Rangu (Jenny), Nandu Bhende as Ankush (Macheath), and Chandrakant Kale as Peachum, did not enjoy the same popularity as Ghashiram. Dr. Jabbar Patel has been making films for the last twenty years, his latest being a magnum opus on the life and work of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Satyadev Dubey has been one of the most influential directors in Maharashtra. It is not uncommon to hear theatre enthusiasts from small towns in the state say that some chance viewing of some play, such as Shyam Manohar's strangely quirky play, *Yakrut* (1986) changed their perception of theatre and its possibilities completely.

Satyadev Dubey is the only director from the sixties' generation to have stayed in touch with every succeeding generation of writers-directors on the non-professional stage. The playwrights' workshop, which he organized in Pune in 1973, was crucial in bringing together the emergent generation of playwrights. Fifteen years later, he held Sunday workshops for the new playwrights. As a subjective selection from amongst the dozens of plays he has directed, *Andha Yug* (1962), *Hayavadana* (1972) and *Aranya* (1984) have been his most outstanding Hindi productions and Elkunchwar's *Raktapushp* [Petals of Blood] (1981), his most sensitive Marathi production.

Something unique happened to non-professional theatre in Mumbai in 1974. Arvind and Sulabha Deshpande managed to persuade the Chhabildas School in Dadar to rent out its assembly hall to their group Awishkar at concessional rates for experimental plays. This school hall soon became a buzzing center of theatre activity, making the name Chhabildas synonymous with the experimental movement in Maharashtra. As the eighties came to an end, theatre activity dwindled and the movement became moribund. The school soon withdrew the concessions it had once offered to young theatre people.

1.5 MALAYALAM THEATRE

K. N. Panikkar (1928 –), is a poet who lives and works in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. His theatre started as an extension of his poetry and even today, draws its strength from his poetic imagination. He writes and directs his own plays for his group, Sopanam, which he established in 1974. He also trains his actors using the innumerable forms and martial arts that abound in the tiny state of Kerala. The martial art called Kalaripayattu is used as the basic system in the training of the actor's body; simultaneously, the actor is also trained in acquiring the inner state of being that is required for the theatre.

Pannikar's most well-known and widely performed productions are Bhasa's *Urubbangam* and his own *Karim Kutty* (1982) and *Ottayan* (1985). His plays work as parables, allowing their traditional folklore content and indigenous theatre language to be imbued with contemporary significance. His answer to the charge of revivalism that critics have leveled against him for using rituals in his work is, "This type of criticism is commonly raised by people committed to a political philosophy. I don't have such a commitment. Also, I have placed no restriction on entering any region of human endeavour for my work. I use ritual as one of the most powerful forms of metrical expression." (Interview with K.S. Narayana Pillai in Contemporary Indian Theatre, Sangeet Natak Akademi)

1.6 MANIPURI THEATRE

Like Kerala in the South, Manipur in the North-East also has its own traditional dance, drama, and story-telling traditions on which Ratan Thiyam draws. Trained in theatre at the National School of Drama (1971-1974), he returned to Imphal to set up his own theatre group, the Chorus Repertory Theatre, in 1976. His most well known works are the Mahabharata trilogy *Urubhangam* [The Shattered Thigh] (1981), *Chakravyuha* [Battle Formation] (1984), and *Karnabharam* [The Burden of Karna] (1989). Of these, his most widely travelled, admired and written about production is *Chakravyuha*, which deals with the death of Abhimanyu, son of Arjun. Like other writers-directors working in post-colonial times, Thiyam too uses theatre to straddle the divide between indigenous theatre traditions and contemporary issues. On the one hand, he sees *Chakravyuha* as a symbol of the conflict between two generations — callow youth pitted against experienced warriors; on the other hand it symbolizes the conflict between the individual and society — Abhimanyu against the seven charioteers. Ultimately, he sees it as a protest against violence and the threat of World War III, which the younger generation faces.

Heisnam Kanhailal expresses the feelings of anger and despair of a neglected people through his work. Manipur's cultural history is dominated by the imposition of Vaishnavism on the local people and its post-Independence political history, by its marginalization on account of its remote geographical position and its people's racial difference from the national mainstream. Kanhailal's strong sense of ethnicity first drove him to steep himself in tradition. Then, under the influence of Badal Sircar, he moved out of the ethnic enclosure into a wider perspective. Finally, he arrived at what he terms the "theatre of transcendence", which goes beyond verbal language and expresses itself through movement, song and dance.

Kanhailal's wife, Sabitri, is one of the finest actresses in India. Nobody who has seen her performance in Kanhailal's most celebrated production, *Pebet,* in which she plays the mother bird anxious for one of her seven babies captured by a cat who teaches it to speak and behave like itself, can ever forget her expressive body movements and her extraordinary voice.

1.7 SOME OTHER PLAYWRIGHTS, THEATRE GROUPS AND THEATRE PERSONALITIES

We shall talk about the Hindi playwright Mohan Rakesh, two theatre groups in Hindi, Habib Tanvir's Naya Theatre and Bansi Kaul's Rang-Vidushak; theatre personality Ebrahim Alkazi and Indian English playwright Mahesh Dattani.

i. Mohan Rakesh, Hindi Playwright (1925 - 1972)

Mohan Rakesh was one of those rare literary personalities who never accept the traditional set-up but always aspire to find and project something, which is challenging and new. Rakesh's language separates him from other Hindi playwrights and puts him of a higher level of competence. His plays — *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* (One Day in Early Autumn, Hindi, 1958), *Lehron Ke Rajhans* (Great Swans of the Waves, Hindi,1963), *Adhe-adhure* (Halfway House) — show that his dialogues have a smooth flow, a meaningful depth and an elemental naturalness suitable to his characters. They express the character's mental conflict, frustration, dissatisfaction and the resulting anger in a unique manner. Though some of the dialogues between Mallika and Kalidasa in *One Day in Ashadha* tend to be longer than required and seem to be a little heavy on the audience, they are necessary to the play. As Kalidasa says in the play, "people think that living in that life and atmosphere I have written a great deal. But I know that while living there I wrote nothing. What ever I wrote was a recollection of life here". This lengthy dialogue is necessary for the reader to understand the feelings and moods of the characters. But Rakesh became conscious of this and made an effort to reduce the lengths of the dialogues in his other plays namely *The Great Swans of the Waves* and *Halfway House*. Though in the former play, the dialogues between

Nand and Sundari tend to become longer, in *Halfway House* the playwright seems to be completely in control of the situation. Here the dialogues are short, suitable and to the point. They hit at the subject immediately.

ii. Habib Tanvir and his Naya Theatre and Folk Theatre

Habib Tanvir is one of the Hindi theatre directors who started using folk artists in his plays very early on. Returning from his training in England, he found that most of what he had learned made no sense in his native environment. He therefore began working with tribals from the Chhatisgarh region of Madhya Pradesh using their mother language and some of their folklore in his productions. His group, Naya Theatre, formed in 1959, has been doing plays regularly since, struggling for survival every bit of the way. His most celebrated plays have been *Agra Bazaar* (1970) on the bazaar poet Nazir and *Charandas Chor* (1976) about a thief who inadvertently makes a pledge to his guru never to lie. Two other productions of his are *Mitti ki gaadi,* an adaptation of Sudraka's *Mrichhakatikam* and *Bahadur Kalarin,* based on a Chhatisgarhi legend. Although Tanvir himself has been working in the folk idiom, or rather because he has chosen to do so out of individual commitment, he is severely critical of the folksy trend that started in the seventies in a bid to appear "rooted".

iii. Bansi Kaul and his Rang Vidushak

Bansi Kaul came to theatre from a richly varied background, which included painting road signs and the backs of trucks. Kaul has been fascinated with the idea of the vidushak. His group, Rang-Vidushak, is comprised of members who have outside jobs and come mostly from the lower middle-class. In training them for his proposed theatre of the vidushak, he needed to find sources of body language that were immediately accessible to them. He found them on the streets, e.g., street entertainers and gymnasts. Observation and documentation of their gestures and body language is Kaul's training methodology. His plays tell simple tales energetically and humorously.

iv. Ebrahim Alkazi

Ebrahim Alkazi was trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, London. Returning to Mumbai, he set up the city's first amateur theatre group, the Theatre Group in the early fifties. His sensibility was Western, his language English, and his audience elitist. Yet, Alkazi's influence penetrated the local Marathi theatre through Vijaya Mehta's apprenticeship on the advice of her counsellors when she began doing serious theatre. He gave her the visual and performative aesthetics of realistic theatre.

Ebrahim Alkazi's Stanislavskian naturalism, set designs using levels articulated by occasional architectural elements like a pillar or a doorway, the orchestration of costume, lighting, music, and verbal text to arrive at a totality of theatrical effect, came as a radical departure for an audience grown used to star performers, the supremacy of the verbal text, and melodramatic delivery of lines. During his fourteen years in Mumbai, Alkazi staged many of the best-known plays of the West, from the Greeks, Shakespeare, and Moliere, to Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg, and on to Anouillh, Osborne, and Beckett. His first Hindi production came after he moved to Delhi in 1961 as the first director of the National School of Drama (NSD). Two of his most well-known productions during his sixteen-year tenure at the NSD were of Dharmavir

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Bharati's *Andha Yug*, dealing with the aftermath of the Kurukshetra war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, and Girish Karnad's Kannada play *Tughlaq* in Hindi translation. The latter was performed in the old fort in Delhi, giving the production a grand, spectacular scale.

Whether he staged his production in an indoor auditorium or out in an open environment, Alkazi adhered to the Stanislavkian style of acting, and it was this tradition that he bequeathed to the National School of Drama. Although successors like B. V. Karanth broke this mould by introducing the folk elements of music and dance, the strength of the NSD repertory continues to be realism.

v. Mahesh Dattani, Indian English playwright

Mahesh Dattani (1958 –)is a playwright from Bangalore. He writes in English and has had eight plays published, almost all of them performed in Bangalore, most in Mumbai and a couple in Delhi and Kolkata. Dattani has no hang-ups about using the language of India's ex-rulers. His protagonists are not only Gujaratis like himself, but also Gujaratis from Bangalore. The very specificity of his characters, however, carries his plays beyond those confines to become universally relevant. Realistic in form, complex in structure, many of them are shot through with an unforced humour that makes them generally appealing. He won the Sahitya Akademi award for his book of plays *Final Solution* and *Other Play* in 1998.

1.8 A NOTE ON KANNADA DRAMA

1.8.1 Emerging Modern Kannada Drama

Actually the history of modern Kannada drama begins with Karki Venkataramana Shastri's **Iggappa Heggadeya Vivaha Prahasana** (1887). This play deals with the problems of women, widow remarriage, the futile expenditure incurred in a Hindu marriage and the reformation that has to take place in society. Later, B. M. Shrikantaiah. who was inspired by Greek dramas, rewrote the 10th century Kannada epic **'Gadayuddam'** (written by Poet Ranna) in the form of a Greek tragedy. He intuitively saw the possibilities of a tragic hero in the character of Dhuryodhana and with a few deft changes recreated his personality. Another play of his **'Ashwathaman'** was the best example of his serious effort to bring a tragic experience to Kannada literature. He made some changes for the sake of tragic effect, the most drastic change being the death of hero, Ashwathaman, originally one of the seven immortal men as explained in Mahabharata. This play was a transcreation of Ajax of Sophocles. The third play B.M. Shrikantaiah wrote was **'Parasikaru',** a straight translation of a tragedy by Aeschylus. The language and rhythm of these plays are unique. The archaic language used in these works magically creates a living dramatic idiom trying its utmost to recapture the vitality of primitive emotions.

The next important play writer was Sami Venkatadri (1898-1934) popularly known as 'Samas'. Unlike other historic plays by subsequent playwrights, the historic substance in Sams's plays was not used metaphorically, nor was it that his plays voice contemporary sound by giving an ironic twist to historical events. Nothing but the sheer continuity of history must have fascinated Samsa and while following the gradual unfolding of historical events a meaningful dramatic pattern emerged. Of the twenty three plays that he wrote only five have survived. Out of these five, **'Vigada Vikramaraya'** fascinated many critics.

1.8.2 Towards Social Realism

The influence of western drama is quite obvious in both B. M. Shrikantaiah and Samas, but they were also influenced by the Indian classics and history. Their aim was to produce works of enduring value. It was ultimately T. P. Kailasam (1884-1946) and Adya Rangacharya (1904-1985), better known as Shriranga, who brought social realism on the stage. Both Kailasam and Shriranga were educated at British universities and were fully exposed to the influence of the new drama of that time. Kailasam was a popular stage figure in England singing comic songs.

Both these writers started writing plays with a strong protest against professional theatre. Kailasam's short play **'Num Kampni'** (Our Company) was a parody of the professional theatre, which he thought was no longer a theatre. Shriranga's **'Sampushta Ramayana'** ridicules the absurd speeches and gestures of illiterate actors trying to produce a Ramayana Play. Their purpose was to create a new form of drama and a new dramatic idiom, in which task they succeeded. Kailasam's **'Tollu Gatti'** (Hollow and Sound), **'Bahiskara'** (Banish), **'Soole',** (Prostitute), **'Home-Rule'**, **'Ammavra ganda'** (Henpecked Husband), **'Badvalavillada Badayi'** (Empty pride), and Shriranga's **'Kattale Belaku'** (Dark & Light), **'Harijanwara'** (Cut the Sacred Thread), **'Kelu Janamejaya'** (Listen Janamejaya) were a few good plays of that time. Both these writers changed the content and expression of the Kannada theatre. By using common people's language, they brought new dimension to the stage performances. In all we can say, that the essential form of new drama was initiated by these two writers. Both, in their zest for creating an alternative social value system criticized prevailing social practices. Both attacked popular theatre which according to them was promoting a static social order.

K.V. Puttapa, popularly known as 'Kuvempu' converted Hamlet in to **'Raktakshi'**. His other plays **'Beral ge Koral'** (A Head for a Thumb), **'Maharathri' (**Great Night), **'Smashana Kurukshetram',** (Kurukshetra graveyard) all are written in blank verse and their themes are borrowed from our mythology. Dr. Shivarama Karant, noted novelist and rationalist wrote musical plays like **'Mukta Dwara'** (Open Door). All these playwrights developed drama as a literary form and therefore their works reflect the literary tendencies and attitudes of the age.

G. B. Joshi popularly known as 'Jadabharata' in theatre circles started writing plays after Indian independence. His **'Mookabali'** (Silence Victim), **'Kadadida Niru'** (Disturbed Water), **'Nane Bijjala'** (I only Bijjala) and **'Sattavara Neralu'** (Shadow of the Dead) brought the new theatre movement to Karnataka. The all time great director B.V. Karant directed these dramas with imagination that made this theatre successful. Girish Karnad continued this new trend in the seventies and eighties. As we have to discuss Girish Karnad later in detail, we will conclude this chapter with an account of new trends in Kannada theatre.

1.8.3 New Trends

New trends in Kannada theatre started emerging in late 1970's. Dr. Chandrashekhara Kambara derives his strength from the folk plays of northern Karnataka. His **'Sangya Balya'** is one of the most popular dramas even today. His other plays include —. **'Rishyashringa', 'Jokumaraswamy', 'Jai Siddanaika', 'Nai kathe'** (Dog Story), **'Kadu Kudure'** (Forest Horse), **'Harakeya Kuri'** (Scapegoat), **'Samba Shiva Prahasana', 'Siri Sampige', 'Huliya Neralu'** (Shadow of a Tiger). These are all distinguished dramas of Kannada theatre. The use of folk techniques, folk music and folk language have made his dramas popular.

The significant departure from Shriranga or Kailasam is that of Lankesh. For Lankesh, playwriting was an extension of his literary pursuits, but interestingly, Lankesh used theatre to vivify the socio cultural milieu of the middle class family that was failing to grapple with the facts of modern urban life. Through **'Kranthi Banthu Kranthi'** (Revolution Came Revolution!), **'Nanna Tangigondu Gandu Kodi'** (Give a Bridegroom to My Sister), and **'Giliyu Panjaradolagilla'** (Parrot is not in the Cage), Lankesh has tried to explain to us that the inadequacies of the individual do not allow us to adjust with the changing social situation. In the labyrinth of the male world, the suffocated woman aspires for liberation and she walks out in **'Nanna Tangigondu Gandu Kodi'**. Even in his play **'Sankranti'**, the historical intercaste marriage is de-contextualized, and folk narratives, so that the characters that appear in the narrative are not only projected as alternative cultural icons, but they are also used as weapons to battle against the dominance of western intellectual paradigms. **'Manteswamy', 'Madari Madaiah'** and **'Mahachaitra'** are other important plays of his.

One of the most interesting theatre stories of post-Independence India is that of K.V. Subanna's *Ninasam*. Subanna and his friends formed this amateur group in 1949, fired with the idea of contributing to the making of new India through theatre. Located in their remote village Hegoddu, 350 km from Bangalore, they worked enthusiastically for ten years with the encouragement of the family and the community. Then with the general post-Independence disillusionment that set in throughout the country, *Ninasam* grew apathetic and crumbled.

In the sixties, a literary movement, *Navya*, was born in Bangalore. Sensing an all Karnataka cultural renaissance, *Ninasam* woke up in 1967 and has never closed its eyes since. Over the years, the repertory expanded its activities to include a training center for actors and an itinerant repertory, *Tirugata*, which caters to all nineteen districts of the state. *Ninasam* also has a film society and its own annual film festival.

K. V. Subanna stands for community-specific theatre. In the paper he read at the *Actor at Work* seminar at the National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in 1991, he confessed that he was partial to the new literature and realistic plays which confronted social issues, but his associates and the local community preferred company-style plays with a loud gesture language and voice projection. A middle road was found in the selection of plays through confrontation and discussion. Even the politics or the lack thereof of the *Ninasam* repertoire and "also the style of our productions… evolved through this kind of confrontation, quarrel and resolution or synthesis". Distinguishing between *prekshaka* (audience) and *samjika* (community), he went on the say, "You can speak to an audience, but your intimacies can be shared only with a community through a homogeneity of culture." Given this belief, he finds concepts like pan-Indian, national, international and cross-cultural extremely naïve.

Indian theatre today is as richly varied as its languages and its terrain. What is common to all the theatres described here is their perpetual struggle to survive. Theatre practitioners like to console themselves with the thought that always being on the edge is what theatre is all about. Yet, a wider patronage would do Indian theatre no harm.

1.9 LET US SUM UP

There were many kinds of plays from the 1920s till date. There were Sanskrit plays translated in to many Indian languages. During 1930s the socio-political plays gained popularity. After independence, theater activities focused on national identity, Indian myths, folktales, rituals, history and motifs from popular culture occupied an important place in theatre. What we have outlined above are theatre activities in some major languages like Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam, Manipuri.

The foregoing discussion is not meant to be exhaustive.

But I hope the outline of major trends in post-independence theatre and the work of some important theatre personalities has given you some idea of the rich variety and vitality of theatre activities in Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam, Manipuri, Kannada, Hindi and English in major centers in the country. The quest for a true authentic Indianness is on. I am sure you are now ready to take on Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*.

1.10 QUESTIONS

1. Write down some of the important milestones of the contemporary Indian theatre.
2. Assess the contributions of the Bengali playwrights to the growth of Indian theatre.
3. How was the theatre in Kerala and Manipuri different from other states?
4. Examine the major challenges that contemporary Indian theatre is facing.
5. Write a note on the contribution of Chandrasekhar Kambar to Kannada theatre.

1.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Deshpande, G.P., ed. *Modern Indian Drama: An Anthology*.New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2000. Contains a 10-page introduction by the editor. [includes *Listen Janameyjaya* by Sriranga, *The Vultures* by Vijay Tendulkar, *One Day in Ashadha* by Mohan Rakesh, *Evam Indrajit* by

Badal Sircar, *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad, *The Lone Tusker* by K.N.Panikkar, *Siri Sampige* by Chandrasekhar Kambar, *From Sunset to Sunrise* by Surendra Verma, *Aurangzeb* by Indira Parthasarathy, *Mahapoor* by Satish Alekar, *Mareech, the Legend* by Arun Mukheerje, *Hunting the Sun* by Utpal Dutt, *Whirlpool* by Datta Bhagat, *Mother of 1084* by Mahasweta Devi, and *Roads* by Govind Purushottam Deshpande.]

Tendulkar, Vijay. *Five Plays: Kamala, Silence! The Court is in Session, Sakharam Binder, The Vultures, Encounter in Umbugland* .New Delhi: Oxford, 1992; Oxford India Paperbacks 1995; rpt. 1998. Contains a 13-page introduction by Arundhati Banerjee.

Dharwadker, Aparna Bhargava. *Theatres of Independence*: *Drama, Theory, Urban Performance in India since 1947*. New Delhi: Oxford, 2005. [This is an indispensable book on post-independence Indian drama]

UNIT 2 INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR AND THE PLAY

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Girish Karnad and his Works
    2.1.1 Girish Karnad: Important Dates
    2.1.2 List of Plays
    2.1.3 Notes on the Plays
    2.1.4 Girish Karnad's Films
    2.1.5 Girish Karnad as a Playwright
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2.3 Approaching the Play
2.4 Detailed Commentaries on the Play
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall introduce you to Girish Karnad and his plays, discuss possible approaches to a play. We shall then converge on the prescribed text, *Tughlaq,* providing you with a scene by scene commentary for your detailed study and comprehension.

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2.1 GIRISH KARNAD AND HIS WORKS

2.1.1 Girish Karnad: Important dates

1938: Born on 19th May at Matheran in the Konkani region of Maharashtra.
1958: Graduation from Karnatak University, Dharwad.

1961: *Yayati*
1963: Rhodes scholar at Oxford.
1963: *Ma Nishad*
1964: *Tughlaq*
1963-1970: Assistant Manager, Oxford Univ Press and then Manager; resigned to devote himself full time to writing and film making.
1970-72: Homi Bhabha Fellowship for Creative Work on Folklore
1970: President's Gold Medal for the Best Film for *Samskara*
1971: *Hayavadana* (Kannada); Eng trans.1973
1974-75: Director, Film and Television Institute of India
1974: Padma Shri
1976-78: President, Karnataka Natak Akademi.
1977: *Anjumallige.* Director, Nehru Centre, the cultural wing of the High Commission for India.
1987-88: Fullbright Playwright in Residence and Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago.
1988: *Naga-manadala*
1988-93: Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi
1992: Padma Bhushan
1990: *Tale-danda*
1993: The Guthrie Theatre of Minneapolis presented his *Nagamandala* for its 30th Anniversary Celebrations and commissioned *The Fire and the Rain* for the next year.
1994: *Agni mattu male* Padma Bhushan.
1999: Bharatiya Jnanpith Award.
2000: *Tippu Sultan kanda kanasu*

2.1.2 List of Plays

Here is a list of plays by Girish Karnad. The language in which they were written and the date of translation in English is indicated in the brackets.

1961: *Yayati* (Kannada). Remains untranslated into English
1964: *Tughlaq* (Kannada) Eng. trans.
1971: *Hayavadana* [Horse Head] (Kannada); Eng. trans.1973.
1977: *Anjumallige* [Driven Snow] (Kannada)
1980: *Hittina hunja* [Dough Rooster] (Kannada]
1988: *Naga-mandala* [Play with a Cobra] (Kannada). Eng. trans. 1988
1990: *Tale-danda* [Death by Decapitation] (Kannada); Eng. trans. 1993
1994: *Agni mattu male* (The Fire and the Rain) (Kannada); Eng. trans. 1998.
2000: *Tippu Sultan kanda kanasu* [The Dreams of Tippu Sultan] (Kannada) Produced by the BBC during the Fiftieth Anniversary of Indian Independence.
2002: *Bali: The Sacrifice* (Kannada) Commissioned and first produced by 2002 Haymarket Theatre, Leicester, UK. Published in English with *The Dreams of Tippu Sultan,* 2004.
2005 *Odakalu Bimba* (Kannada) (*Broken Images*) (English) 2005.
2005: *The Flowers* (Kannada, English and Hindi)

(The names in Kannada and in translation and dates to be checked by Dr Billi Male.)

2.1.3 Notes on the Plays

i. Yayati

Karnad's first play, *Yayati* (1961), was originally written in the Kannada language. This play was published in the sixties when the Navya (Modernist) movement was at its peak in Karnataka. Poetry and short story were the two genres that were affected by it most. Gopala Krishna Adiga taught poetry to sing in new rhythms and the interpretation of this poetry was a challenge to the intellectuals. For the first time, the Kannada poets discovered that new thoughts demand a new kind of idiom for their expression. The modernity for Kannada poets means a new way of thinking rather than the prevalence of a new sensibility. It is not surprising that drama for a time being was not affected by the new movement, perhaps because dramatic language has to be more communicative than that of poetry. We do not know whether Karnad, who was one of the youngest writers of that time, had consciously realized it or not. His first play Yayati, like the plays of Jean-Paul-Sartre, has a conventional form it closely resembles the form of popular drama in Marathi, but new in its import.

Yayati re-tells the myth of Yayati, one of the ancestors of the Pandavas, in modern terms. The ancestors of the Pandavas like Pururava, Nahusha, Yayati or Dushyanta enact the myth of immortality in its various aspects. Yayati's is a more interesting experiment. He falls in love with Devayani, the daughter of a Brahmin and also her friend, Sharmishtha, the daughter of demon king Virupaksha. Yayati's marriage with Devayani is fatal because it honours the humiliating conditions of Devayani that Sharmishtha should be her servant. But Yayati, who loves both, gets children by both of them. Devayani who is angered by her husband's betrayal, complains to her father, who curses Yayati that he should suffer old age. Yayati exchanges his old age with his son's youth and continues to enjoy life for a long time. Puru is the ideal son who is ready to sacrifice his precious youth for the sake of his father. Yayati borrows his son's youth with an unconscious desire to imitate gods, because gods are both immortal and ageless. Yayati's lust or Puru's sacrifice seems to have been born out of the system of the values of the epic poetry.

Karnad's play protests against this symbolic value system. The protest is voiced through Puru, who is the protagonist of the play. He returns victorious from a swayamvara along with his wife Chitralekha. But he is critical of the whole setup of chivalrous culture. He had won the bride not because he was valiant and heroic but because he was the son of Yayati. Puru in this play is not a man of action but is withdrawn and meditative. He accepts his father's old age not with a sense of sacrifice but because he is psychologically and prematurely old. Puru is sick of the palace life, its pomp and glory. He is still groping in the dark for the meaning of life. He is sick of the felicity of life, but has not perceived any truth beyond it.

In the original epic Mahabharata, Yayati takes thousand of years of to return youth to Puru. But in Karnad's play he returns it soon and the realizations are like a flash of lightning. In the epic, Puru is still a bachelor, while in the play he is married. But Puru who has lost his youth cannot love his wife. It is his wife, Chitralekha who challenges Yayati, questioning the morality of the exchange of youth and age. She also insists that the father who has borrowed the son's youth, should also take her as his wife. The rational of her arguments morally unnerve Yayati and the moral implications of his new relation terrifies him. Karnad's play goes a step further towards Chitralekha's death. This end makes the exchange of youth and age and the realization and everything that precedes it absurd and meaningless. The main strength of this play is in characterization. The mythical characters that are archetypal have become fully individualized in the play.

ii. *Ma Nishad*

Ma Nishad (1963) is a one-act radio drama in which Karnad depicts the importance of the ordinary man for the hero Rama in the Ramayana.

iii. *Hayavadana*

Girish Karnad's third play *Hayavadana* deals with the problem of human identity. Karnad has borrowed the theme for this play from an old collection of stories — *Vetala Panchavimshati*. Critics pointed out that Karnad has received this plot through Thomas Mann. The original story in Sanskrit is a comic one, in which the riddle is more important than the plot. But it has become all the more comic in the mock-heroic style of Thomas Mann. Mann's story gently ridicules the mechanical notion of the real distinction between the body and the spirit. For Mann the organic unity of the body and soul seems to have been manoeuvered by nature for the realization of human destiny. Nanda and Shridamana who's heads are transposed in a comic accident and thus their destinies are also changed. But the situation remains the same even after the transposition of the heads. The transformed young men do not change in nature and the story becomes as Mann comically puts it, "another example to describe the gruesome guiles of Maya". The only transformation that takes place in the story, is that the two protagonists suddenly become antagonists for the sake of Sita, a beautiful damsel of 'broad hips'.

Karnad has, more or less, taken the same theme and has added a sub-plot of a 'horse-man' who in search of completeness becomes a horse at the end. The main story of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini, works out the problem of human identity through fascinating details. The two inseparables, Devadatta and Kapila, are still in the process of individuation. These friends are already antagonists in the making, in the sense, that each is complemented by the other, and also they oppose one another. They are bound by mutual love and live like one individual in two physical frames. The problem of identity does not bother them as long as they are friends. But Devadatta falls in love with Padmini and marries her, and from this moment the relationships get complicated. Padmini is devoted to her husband but she is also attracted by the excellent masculine form of Kapila. Fortunately, the plot does not end up in the situation of a 'love-triangle', nor does it get a tragic twist by the theme of a jealous husband. The characters of this play live in a world different from ours, the difference being not historical but only spiritual. The hysterical suicide which Devadatta commits, believing it to be a sacrifice to Goddess Kali, is as comic as the erroneous transposition of heads done by Padmini.

In the original story, there is a riddle, which contains an ethical question. Whom should Padmini accept as her husband? Should she accept the person who has the head of Devadatta or the head of Kapila? The solution to this problem is given by a sage: the identity of human beings is established by the head, which is the holiest part of the human body. Thomas Mann retains this situation for the purpose of ridiculing it. This situation is not there in *Hayavadana*, because it is not relevant here. Karnad treats the problem of man's identity as an intellectual and a spiritual problem. Padmini, in order to get the complete satisfaction of love has to love two persons. Only for a brief period she lives in perfect happiness with one Devadatta, who has the head of Devadatta and the body of Kapila. But she soon realizes that perfection is only an illusion because the very organic unity of body and soul brings about the change in Kapila's body. Karnad for the first time used a number of theatrical images in his drama. These images do not develop into symbols, at best they are ideational equivalents. But they are powerful enough to create a world of their own for the manifestation of the plot. The play is filled with half formed beings, right from the elephant-god which the play invokes, to a man with the head of a horse. Dolls speak the comment like human beings, while the son of Padmini rarely opens his mouth to speak. The yawning goddess careless creates and recreates the world, allows the heads to be transposed and transforms the horse-man into a complete horse. The only glory allowed to this kind of life is the lusty but monotonous movement symbolized by the horse and the idiotic rider moving round and round the stage.

What is important about *Hayavadana* as a play is that it doesn't depend solely upon language to convey its significance. In one of his interviews Karnada said, 'language is one of the many factors of drama'. Theatrical images, miming and stage-property also can be used for the purpose for conveying the undertones. The play also uses the conventions and techniques of folk-drama.

iv. Anjumallige

Uses the myth of Yama and Yami in the Rig Veda to explore the problem of incest. The play is located in England. But both the problem and the violence of the play are not convincing. The play doesn't seem to have been very successful.

v. Hittina Hunja

This play is convincing as a dramatic interpretation of Yashodhara Charite of Janna (1230 AD). But the claustrophobic setting of the play doesn't allow the freedom of the narrative and becomes a bundle of arguments echoing and reechoing in a Jaina temple.

vi. Naga-mandala

Naga-mandala is based on two folktales Karnad heard from A.K.Ramanujan. A playwright is cursed to stay awake all night in the temple and as he attempts to do so, he meets the spirit of a story who has slipped out of an old woman's mouth as she snored. The story is that of a young bride who is neglected by her indifferent husband and attempts to win his affection with a love potion; instead, she enchants a king Cobra who begins to meet her every night while her husband is away.

vii. Tale-danda (Death by Decapitation)

"*Tale-danda*" literally means, "Head Price/Tax". Though not on the scale of *Tughlaq*, *Tale-danda* is based on a theme which is very relevant to present day Indian caste-based and communal politics. The play is set in the 13-14th century Karnataka, where the political situation is in a state of turmoil. The plot relates to the saint-poet-philosopher-minister, Basvanna, his life and times. *Tale-danda* keeps in tradition with Karnad's selection of plots — from popular Indian folklore as in *Nagamandala*, mythology, as in *Yayati* and *Agni mattu male* (The Fire and the Rain) or socio-political themes as in *Tughlaq* and the present play. In essence, *Tale-danda* captures the entire history, especially the later part of Basvanna's life in a play, which is something remarkable, as there are countless books and theses written on Basvanna. Specifically, *Tale-danda* depicts the struggle of one man for social reformation — this is just the surface. A deeper look into the play provides immense food for thought, what with tales interwoven into the play, and how the destiny of a society is swayed by the whims of a few. *Tale-danda* brings out the intricate complexities of a social order prevailing during that period, when the caste system was at its rigid worst. The best part of *Tale-danda* is its pre-climax (which incidentally is powerful in all Karnad's plays) when the protagonist faces a moral dilemma. Karnad has pictured it with depth, that each reading furnishes new meanings, and new possibilities.

viii. Agni mattu male (The Fire and the Rain)

Karnad bases his *Agni mattu male* [The Fire and the Rain] (1994) on the little known story of Yavakri from the Mahabharat of a seven-year-long fire sacrifice It is an obscure story which a certain sage narrates to the Pandavas, and to a lay reader, passes off as insignificant. What Girish Karnad has done, however, is to transform it into a masterful piece of drama by depicting conflicting human emotions through the characters. It is an excellent combination of the elements — human, metaphysical and supernatural that constitutes the core of the play. Karnad successfully makes use of the divine element — especially in the climax where the hero holds a conversation with the Gods, and the final result of the rain pouring on a drought-ridden land. The play also focuses both on the negative and positive human emotions — jealousy, betrayal, deceit, as well as selfless love (evidenced by the hero and the heroine, Nittile) and sacrifice. The hero, like most of Karnad's heroes, is a man torn between moral righteousness, love and duty. It is interesting to trace this path of the hero to its fitting end. Karnad has stated that "the play lived in my mind for 37 years" before assuming its present form. It is a splendid culmination of his creative intelligence.

Ram Gopal Bajaj, formerly Director of NSD once remarked that after Tagore's *Muktadhara*, and Dharm Vir Bharati's *Andha Yug*, Karnad's play *Agni mattu male* deserved a place among the international masterpieces of our country.

The play was adapted and filmed by Arjun Sajnani with Jackie Shroff and Raveena Tandon and Amitabh Bachchan under the name Agni Varsha.

ix. Tippuvina Kanasugalu (The Dreams of Tippu Sultan)

This play is based on the Mysore King, Tippu Sultan, who died in a war with the British army in 1799. This play is about the early days of colonialism. It explains how colonization began. Tippu Sultan, a king who ruled Mysore state from Shrirangapattana, engaged himself in importing new technologies and technicians from foreign countries. He wanted to establish friendly relations with his neighbours. On the other hand, the British wanted to win the war in order to overcome their humiliations, or to increase their wealth. The play portrays Tippu as a noble king interested in the welfare of his subjects, whereas the British are depicted as treacherous and cunning.

x. Bali: The Sacrifice

The play was commissioned and first produced by 2002 Haymarket Theatre, Leicester, U.K. It is based on an ancient Jain myth in which a king is horrified to discover that his queen has an affair with an elephant-keeper. To avert the evil consequences of the adultery, he is to sacrifice a cockerel to the gods but being a Jain, he cannot bring himself to do so and he sacrifices a bird made of dough. The play is concerned with the morality of substitution.

xi. The Flowers

The play is a dramatic monologue and is a triangular tale of loyalty and lust. It uses the famous legend of the priest Veeranna of the Chitradurga region, who is involved in an extramarital relationship with a courtesan. The flowers of the title are the flowers with which the priest decorates the Shivalinga before the young Chieftain comes to the temple and later the naked body of Chandravati, the courtesan. He is torn between his love for God and erotic love, between his wife and unlawful mistress, between his duty to the king and his duty to his wife.

xii. Odakalu Bimba Broken Images

Like *The Flowers*, *Broken Images* is a dramatic monologue. Moving away from myth and folktales and history, Girish Karnad breaks new ground by dealing with contemporary issues like the politics of language and how images constantly thrown at us by the modern electronic age affect human relationships. The play concerns a struggling Kannada short story writer who for once writes in English and her work becomes a bestseller. The inner tension is dramatized when her mirror image shown on the television screen on the stage starts questioning the successful writer. The play in Hindi translation was presented on 7 March 2008 at the Ramayani auditorium and was very well received. (The Hindu, Metroplus, 2, Saturday, March 8, 2008)

Karnad has been a playwright for the last forty years and is growing as an artist and, one hopes, he will produce yet another masterpiece in line with *Tughlaq* and *Hayavadana*. In both these plays he has created a drama verging on the theatre of the absurd by fusing comedy and tragedy. Apparently Karnad is not at home in realistic drama and the reason, perhaps, is that he feels that realistic drama cannot express fully what the playwright feels about life deeply.

2.1.4 Girish Karnad's Films

Girish Karnad won the Presidents' Gold Medal for the best feature film *Samskara* in 1970. His directorial debut was with *Vamsha Vriksha*, along with B V Karanth and he later moved to Hindi films to work with Syam Benegal for his films *Nishant, Manthan* and *Kalyug*. His award winning film *Kaadu* (The Forest, 1973) is a violent rural drama about rivalry between two villages as seen through the eyes of a young boy, Kitti. The boy, who is staying with his uncle Chandre Gowda and aunt Kamali, notices his uncle's secret visit to his mistress in the next village. This affair escalates into a larger confrontation between Chandra Gowda and his rival Shivaganga, which eventually leads to violence, the death of aunt Kamali and the arrival of the police. The boy cannot distinguish the specifically man-made violence that surrounds him from the more primeval threats presented by the dense forest which, according to legend, contains a killer bird that calls out its victims by name. In a fantasy ending, the boy imagines the bird calling him and he follows the call, ignoring the frantic voices of his parents who want to take him home. Another award winning film of his *Cheluvi*, (The Flowering Tree, 1992) is based on a Karnataka folktale. A young woman, Cheluvi, living in abject poverty with her mother and sister, can turn herself into a tree yielding an endless supply of blossoms as long as they are picked very carefully. Kumar, the son of the village headman, seduced by the scent of the flowers, marries Cheluvi and they enjoy her flowering in strict privacy. During Kumar's absence, the headman's younger daughter Shyama forces Cheluvi to disclose her secret. Unable to comprehend the delicacy and beauty of the event, the children destroy the tree, leaving Cheluvi's body a mutilated tree-stump. *Ondanondu Kaladalli* (1978), *Utsav* (1984), and *Kanuru Heggadathi* are his other award winning films.

Awards

Some of the many important awards won by Girish Karnad are as under:

i. Sangeet Natak Akademi award for playwriting (1972)
ii. Bhartiya Natya Sangh award for *Hayavadana* (1972)
iii. Padma Sri (1974)
iv. Padma Bhushan (1992)
v. Sahitya Akademi award for *Tale-danda* (1994)
vi. President's Gold Medal for film *Samskara* (1970)
vii. Jnanpith Award (1999) for achievement in Indian drama.

2.1.5 Girish Karnad as a Playwright

A multi-faceted personality

Girish Karnad is a multi-faceted personality. He is among the top three contemporary Indian playwrights, the other two being Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar. But among contemporary Indian playwrights Girish Karnad has had what Aparna Dharwadker says 'the strongest life outside the theatre, in films and television'. He has been a fine actor, has written and also directed several films and television serials in Kannada and Hindi. He has been a cultural administrator too — having been the head of the Nehru Cultural Centre, Indian High Commission in London, among other assignments. However, he has repeatedly said that he has done films to make money and that his primary love has always been theatre. When asked what worried him about the new situation of theatre in India, Karnad said: 'What worries me really is that there is no theatre — a theatre that may sustain a playwright and save him from drudging in films, bad serials, or whatever to keep his body and soul together'. ('I am trying to create my own tradition'. Interview with Girish Karnad by Chaman Ahuja HYPERLINK "http://www.tribuneindia.com" March 21, 1999.) In an earlier interview, he pointed out that one couldn't earn a comfortable living even from a successful play. *Tughlaq* has been enormously successful, both critically and in performance. 'Playwrights in the West have been able to retire on such successes or at least, to devote themselves to that activity entirely. I can't, and that irritates me'. Interview with Aparna Dharwadker, Jul 1993; published *New Theatre Quarterly*, Nov 1995).

Karnad's love of theatre goes back to his childhood days when he saw plays in his small town of Sirsi, staged by strolling groups of players called Natak mandalies or Natak companies. He was lucky to have parents who were addicted to these plays. He also sat up with servants at nights watching the more traditional Yakshagana theatre. The love for theatre apparently stuck and has continued till this day.

At sixty Karnad said: 'I've had a good life. I have managed to do all I could wish for even be a government servant. Now I feel whatever time I have left should be spent doing what I like best writing plays. ('Girish Karnad' www.imagination.com) (italics added) His writing continues unabated. Two dramatic monologues of his — *The Flowers* and *Broken Images* appeared in 2005.

As a very young man, Karnad wanted to be a poet in English and be like Shakespeare and T.S. Eliot but when he was about twenty-one or so he realized that he would never be one. He did achieve international fame not for writing poetry but plays — and in Kannada.

In his introduction to *Three Plays* (1994; 2004) Karnad refers to the shattering experience of seeing Strindberg's *Miss Julie* directed by Ebrahim Alkazi when he came to Bombay for studies. Nothing, he says, had prepared him for 'the power and violence' of seeing 'the inner recesses of the human psyche' laid bare on the stage. Also, instead of the usual torches or petromax lamps lighting the stage, he saw new technology in the form of dimmers 'that could gently fade the light in or out'. These two things together, he says, 'defined a stage that was nothing we had known or suspected. I have often wondered whether it wasn't that evening that, without being actually aware of it, I decided I wanted to be a playwright (2).

Choice of language

Karnad's mother tongue is Konkani but he grew up speaking Kannada. And he has written almost all his plays, except the play *Dreams of Tippu Sultan* in Kannada. This play was commissioned by the BBC and was written in English. *Broken Images* which he himself directed at Bangalore was written in both Kannada and English. Except for *Yayati* (1961), he has translated all his plays into English himself. His plays have been available in other languages also. All this has ensured an all India audience for Karnad's plays.

On Translations

Translations, says Karnad, are always welcome: 'The world has thousands of languages and translation is inevitable and essential. There are some very good translations available. Without it, we would not know so many Greek and Sanskrit stories'. ('Karnad's images for the new age'. www.hindustantimes.com He himself translated *Evam Indrajit* by Badal Sircar.

His play *Broken Images* was done in both Kannada and English and staged in Bangalore simultaneously. This led to interesting results. Arundhati Raja, who played the lead role in one of the versions, said that people who watched the English version would come to watch the Kannada version as well and vice versa. That was just to see how the story was presented in the two languages.

About his experience of translation he says in a note to Naga-mandala: 'I write in Kannada. English is the language of my adulthood. This translation must therefore be seen only as an approximate to the original (Introduction *Three Plays* 20)'.

Politics of language

Karnad is of course aware of the politics of language, particularly of the politics of English. His concern with it is expressed in his recent play *Broken Images* (2005) which deals with a professor of English who is a writer in a regional language but who produces a bestseller in English.

Use of myth, folktale and history

At one place Girish Karnad facetiously said: 'I cannot invent plots therefore I use myths. I cannot invent stories and hence go to history. (HYPERLINK http://www.expressindia.com. 1999). But jokes apart, it is true that most of his plays are rooted in myth and folktale and history.

For a writer writing in post-Independent India, it is only natural that he should want to view the new nation's concerns and his own concerns in terms of the country's past. When on getting the Rhodes scholarship for study at Oxford he was faced with his personal dilemma between his obligation to his family and his own desire for freedom, he found himself using the old Puranic myth of Yayati and discovered how well the myth reflected his anxieties.

'While I was writing the play, I saw it only as an escape from my stressful situation. But looking back, I am amazed at how precisely the myth reflected my anxieties at that moment, my resentment with all those who seemed to demand that I sacrificed my future. By the time I had finished working on Yayati, the myth had enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally. Whether to return home finally seemed the most minor of issues; the myth had nailed me to my past'. ('Introduction': *Three Plays*: 3) (italics added) The last sentence is important: the past has continued to provide him, as it has done to numerous other authors here and elsewhere in the West, archetypal situations and parallels through which he could articulate contemporary concerns. The first play in post-independent India that used myth to make a contemporary statement and which has become an acknowledged classic was Dharmavir Bharati's *Andha Yug* [The Blind Epoch], written for the radio in 1954. But that was only the beginning. There have been other retrospective representations too. Those of you who are interested in exploring the use of myth in post-independent drama in India could read *Theatres of Independence* (Chapter 6 on Myth, Ambivalence, and Evil) (2005) by Aparna Dharwadker. For details of Karnad's own use of myth and history, you could refer to the notes on individual plays given earlier.

The 'Double' as the central motif

In an interview with Dr Ashok Pai, who is a psychiatrist, Girish Karnad said that it was only when he wrote his third play, that he realized that certain themes recurred in his plays or that 'certain themes seemed to stimulate me themes with the 'Double' as the central motif'. He said he had read Freud, Jung and Adler but that his 'fascination with the complexities of the human psyche comes from the Mahabharata and my study of Dostoevsky'. Karnad's preoccupation with the essential incompleteness of human beings and with the duality of human personality is patent. This duality can be seen in Tughlaq also. (Indian Psychiatric Society Karnatak State Branch Newsletter, May 2005, 4-5)

Girish Karnad's achievement

Girish Karnad's great achievement lies in re-interpreting the country's past, both its myth and folktales and history, to comment on matters of contemporary interest and also offer insights on human condition in general.

When asked what his legacy would be, he saw a legacy of his generation: 'I am happy to belong to a generation that had a Dharma Vir Bharati, a Mohan Rakesh, a Vijay Tendulkar, and I. Together we can claim that we did create a national theatre for modern India'. (*India Today*: 12 April, 1999)

2.2 HOW *TUGHLAQ* CAME TO BE WRITTEN?

The play owes its origin to the words of the noted Kannada critic Kirtinath Kurtkoti in his book *Nadedu Banda Dari* (1959) in which he said that Kannada had produced no good historical plays, none that was in any sense significant' (*Enact*: 54: 1971). Girish Karnad was at that time, i.e. in the early sixties, studying at the University of Oxford as a Rhodes scholar and he accepted the challenge. He set about reading up pre-modern Indian history for a possible subject and zeroed in on the fascinating figure of Muhammad Tughlaq who has been described as 'the wisest fool'. 'This is marvelous, I thought' and he read through all the historiographical materials available at Oxford. His sources included Ziauddin Barani's Tarikh-I-Ferozeshahi. Barani himself appears in the Girish Karnad's play. In an interview in *Enact* in 1971, He said: 'What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq's history was that it was contemporary. The fact was that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come to the throne of Delhi…and one of the greatest failures also'.

The reference to failure is important because as Karnad said, 'though contemporaneity and all that is fine, one picks on a theme because somewhere it hits one. And I think basically, as a person, I am very much afraid of failure; and this particular point in Tughlaq, of a person struggling against failure and failing more, somewhere must have found an immediate echo in me'.

As for influences on him, he listed the following: Anouilh's Becket, Camus's Caligula, Shakespeare. He also listed Ivan the Terrible, the Eipstein film.

The text of *Tuglaq* used in this Study Material is included in *Three Plays : Naga-mandala Hayavadano Tughlaq* 1995; Sep. 2004 New Delhi: OUP, 141 – 221).

2.3 APPROACHING THE PLAY

Creative Reading

Drama, unlike poetry and novel, is a collaborative art and the words on the page spring to life fully only on the stage. From the simplest to the most profound speech, every utterance achieves its complete meaning when it is skillfully uttered in front of an audience.

As students learning through the distance mode, you have to try to bring your experience of reading the text as close as possible to the experience of a person watching the play on the stage. If you get an opportunity to watch a real performance, there is nothing like it. But if that is not possible, you could try collaborative reading and if that also is not possible, you could make a solo effort and read aloud. Even reading the lines by yourself as you think Muhammad, or Najib or Barani would speak them would help. This would help you to convert words into living images. The aim of all your effort is to get at the heart of the play. Once that becomes clear, all other elements can be related to this central point.

Three Questions to ask

In his essay entitled 'On Reading Modern Plays', Anthony Caputi says that every playwright writing a play makes three distinct kinds of artistic decisions. First is the choice of the subject matter. Why does a writer select one particular subject and not another? What is it about the story, its characters and the interaction between them that suits the purpose of the writer? In this case we could ask: Why Tughlaq? Capute has called such decisions *substantial decisions* — decisions about the substance of the play.

Next come what he calls *representational decisions*. What is it that writer decides to represent on the stage and why? Similarly what are those elements which he decides merely to report and why? This question could be asked about the first scene of Tughlaq. For instance, the Sultan, we are told, has made several announcements but why does he show only the announcement relating to the decision against the Sultan himself in favour of a Brahmin and not others? Such decisions would determine 'what was to be represented, in what order the various events were to be represented, and in what scale and proportion they were to be represented. Answers to these questions would determine the ultimate shape of the play.

Finally, a writer has to make what are called *focusing decisions*. After the subject matter has been chosen and after decisions have been taken about the basic shape of the play, 'there is a host of more limited decisions that sharpen particular qualities, highlight particular issues, embolden particular elements, in other words, that focus the action and its peculiar power'. (ed. *Modern Drama*.1966, xiii)

These questions could help you reach the heart of the play. You could start by asking these questions about this play.

Writing a History Play

One question to ask about this play is: Why do dramatists write a history play? What is their motive? Do they write it to celebrate a historical personage and his achievements or the achievements of an age? Shakespeare's Henry V could be cited as an example of this. Is our play celebratory in intent? Or do they write a history play to make sense of the past that seems relevant to our concerns in the present? If that is so, what are those concerns and in what way does this play illuminate the present times? Girish Karnad himself found Tughlaq to be a fascinating figure for being 'the most idealistic' and 'the most intelligent' king of Delhi and also 'one of the greatest failures'. We shall discuss the whole question later in the study material. Meanwhile keep these questions in mind as you read the play. And do keep notes as you go along.

2.4 DETAILED COMMENTARIES ON THE PLAY

[Part One]

SCENE ONE

Popular response to the new king's idealistic, innovative, secular policies; shadow of dissent and misuse.

The first scene introduces us to a conversation among ordinary citizens of Delhi about the new king's idealistic, innovative, secular policies after one of the many royal announcements made. The time is A.D.1327 and the place is the yard in front of the Chief Court of Justice in Delhi.

While there is support for the king, especially among the young, there is also dismay at some of his secular ideas. His policy of compulsory prayers five times a day is generally welcomed. But his decision not to charge jiziya from the Hindus, his decision to ensure impartial justice with a human face to all (of which we see a practical example) and his idea of transfer the capital to Daultabad on strategic grounds of its central location and on grounds of its being a Hindu city puzzles and even bewilders the Muslim populace.

After the announcement of the acceptance of the suit against the king and an award of five hundred dinars and a job as compensation, the king himself appears and talks of his ideal of moving towards greater justice, equality, progress and a more purposeful life. His idea of shifting his capital to Daulatabad was, among other things, meant to strengthen the bonds between Muslims and Hindus.

The death of Sultan's father and brother, already a subject of public discussion with Sheikh Imam-ud-din openly accusing the king of murdering them at Kanpur a week back, is talked about. A certain likeness of gestures or mannerisms between the Sheikh and the king is also referred to.

Already chinks could be seen in the well-intentioned policies. Near the end we discover that the Brahmin who has won his suit against the Sultan is Aziz , a Muslim dhobi from Shiknar. He had bought the land that had been confiscated from a brahmin and predating his contract had filed a suit against confiscation. Aziz asks his friend Aazam, who is a smalltime pick-pocket, to join him in all his moneymaking plans right up to Daulatabad, a suggestion to which the later agrees.

It is good first scene: tightly constructed and economical and while it puts us in possession of essential details of the past it also prepares us for the drama that is to follow. Most of the major characters are either introduced or referred to. The opposition to the policies of the king anticipates the much greater unpopularity that follows later on. We have a glimpse of reported criticism of the king by Sheikh Imam-ud-din, which prepares us for the conspiracy against the Sultan later.

Exercises/Questions

Make a list of incidents/episodes that are reported and not represented before us.

1. In what sense can we call the scene economical?
2. Pick out the sentences that suggest that the Sultan was idealistic.
3. Why does the Sultan want to shift his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad?
4. The use of the prayer motif in the play seems important. Prayers have been compulsory and yet the Sultan is accused of murdering his father and brother while they were praying. Doesn't this remind you of Hamlet?
4. Is there any element of performance in the first scene?
5. What does the presence of two thieves Aziz and Aazam in the play suggest to us?

SCENE TWO

The Sultan's discusses the twin issue of the invasion of Ain-ul-Mulk and the disaffection of Sheikh Imam-ud-din with advisers; a clever move is hinted at.

In contrast to the previous scene, Scene Two is set in a room in the palace. The focus here is the danger posed by Ain-ul-mulk's marching to Delhi and by the open criticism of the Sultan by Sheikh Imam-ud-din, referred to in Scene One.

The Sultan is elated at having solved the most famous problem of chess. When his stepmother suggests that he had better write to Ain-ul-Mulk about this, he tells her that Ain-ul-Mulk, his childhood friend and fellow champion of chess is marching towards Delhi. However the Sultan doesn't seem overly worried about it. On the contrary when the stepmother says she is worried about his keeping later hours, his reply shows him to be a visionary — he makes a theatrical speech in which he imagines himself climbing to the tallest tree and asking his people to confide their worries in him and share their joys with him. He in fact proposes a complete merger of their bodies and his. But one life is too short for this momentous task. So he says he can't waste time in sleeping.

In the course of the conversation he discovers that his stepmother too suspects that he had murdered his father and brother. He obviously doesn't like it.

Vizier Muhammad Najib and historian Ziauddin Barani are announced. Najib informs the Sultan that he has been able to collect more than six thousand soldiers—he doesn't say against whom. He also informs him that Sheikh Imam-ud-din is in Delhi and that he is openly critical of the Sultan as being incompetent and that he has become a backbone of the rebels, adding that Barani could give him more information about the Sheikh. But he clearly wants the Sheikh eliminated.

Barani is shocked at being spied upon but he admits hearing the Sheikh and that the Sheikh thinks the Sultan to be a disgrace to Islam and also that he had murdered his father and brother. Barani tries ineffectually to defend the Sheikh, saying that the Sultan must ignore these little things. The Sultan however is aghast at the accusation of murder and at the crooked minds of his accusers.

The discussion about Sheikh Imam-ud-din brings out the difference between Najib and Barani. Realistic and ruthless, Najib correctly assesses the danger the Sheikh poses to the Sultan and wants him to be eliminated. The Sultan himself is against any action against him. And Barani, honest and generous, agrees with him saying that the people will respond to the Sultan's courage, honesty and justice. But no one pays any heed to it.

Finally, Najib darkly hints at the resemblance between the Sheikh and the Sultan and the Sultan apparently gets his message. The moment is significant. The Sultan just stares at Najib and later says: 'You are a devil, Najib'. Barani looks on uncomprehendingly. The mind of the two prime movers has been made for the Sultan wants their army to leave for Kanauj the day after the following day. Here we can have a glimpse of the politicking at the highest level, the ruthlessness with which decisions are made and the inability of a mere academician to understand the goings on in the power play.

Do we notice a decline in the Sultan's idealism or do we get to discover another side to his complex personality? Read the play and make up your mind. There is obviously a ruthless side to his character. The exact plan will uncover itself later. But the Sultan's sentence — You are a devil, Najib. — implies his tacit approval of Najib's clever move that kills two birds with one stone. In this way the Sultan will checkmate the danger posed by his childhood friend and fellow chess champion and solve the problem of the Sheikh's dissent. The writer's use of the motif of chess is clear.

An important fact comes to light here. The Stepmother doesn't like the influence of Najib. He will look after the administration of the kingdom during the Sultan's absence. Additionally he has asked Shihab-ud-din, the Prince of Sampamshahr, to be in Delhi to look after the affairs of the state. The true significance of the arrival of Shiahab-ud-din will become clear later. The Stepmother not only extracts a promise from Barani not to leave the Sultan under any circumstances but also openly suggests the murder of Najib. The Sultan, Najib, Barani , the Stepmother — everyone seems to have his or her own agenda.

Exercises/Questions

1. What is the point of the reference to chess?
2. Why does Muhammad express his visionary ideas theatrically?
3. Choose adjectives that can be used to characterize the Sultan, Najib, Barani and the Sultan's Stepmother.

4. Why doesn't she want the Sultan to call her stepmother? What is the nature of the relationship between the two?
5. In what way does the scene prepare us for the coming action?
6. Which two motifs have been made use of in this play so far?

SCENE THREE

The public meeting fixed for Sheikh Imam-ud-din fails. The Sultan vocalizes his vision of unifying all his people on a basis broader than Koran. The Sheikh agrees to go and persuade Ain-ul-Mulk to desist from invasion.

Preceding the third scene is an announcement on behalf of the Sultan calling people of Delhi to attend a public meeting where Sheikh Imam-ud-din will analyse the administration of the Sultan. The Sultan will himself be present at the meeting. But no one turns up. The reason will become clear as you read the scene.

This scene must be among the most tense scenes in the play. Two formidable adversaries, Sultan and the Sheikh are face to face. The Sheikh, fearless as ever, says the God has given the Sultan 'power, learning, intelligence, talent' and that he should use it to spread the kingdom of God on earth, following the Islamic injunctions. The Sultan however says that his kingdom has millions of Muslims, Hindus and Jains and that there is dirt and sickness in his kingdom which he, not, God must clean. He refutes the Sheikh's charge that he was trying to be another God. He also talks of his deep admiration for the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. The latter's poetry had opened up vision of a world, which, he says, even Arabs or the Koran could not give him. He frankly refuses to excise the Greek part in him or the visions of Zarathustra and Budha.

If he had put the Saiyyids and the ulemas behind the bars, it was because these religious figures had tried to play politics.

Finally, using the Islamic card, the Sultan is able to persuade him to go to Ain-ul-Mulk as his envoy in the name of Islam and help in bringing peace or else Muslim blood will flow. He presents the Sheikh with the new robes, which bring out his resemblance to the Sultan even more strikingly.

As becomes clear later, the failure of the Sheikh's meeting is engineered by the Sultan. By sponsoring the meeting himself on the one hand and prohibiting them from coming to the meeting the Sultan has successfully cut the Sheikh to size. But his move doesn't end here. By sending him as an envoy to Ain-ul-Mulk he practically ensures that he will get killed. The chess metaphor continues.

The Sultan's view that religion and politics be kept apart from one another is an important element in his convictions as a king. He says that he has never denied the existence of God but he doesn't want religious clerics to interfere in politics.

Exercises/Questions

1. How does the Sultan ensure that Sheikh Imam-ud-din will not turn down his suggestion to go and meet Ain-ul-Mulk as his envoy?

2. How, in the Sultan's view, are religion and politics related?
3. Pick out lines that support the idea that Muhammad is an idealistic ruler.
4. Towards the end of the scene the Sultan tells Sheikh Imam-ud-din that he is 'an incompetent fool' and then offers him the robes ordered for going to Kanauj as an envoy. Why does he call himself 'an incompetent fool'?
5. What are the accusations against the Sultan?
6. Do think this is a powerful scene? Why?

SCENE FOUR

Sheikh Imam-ud-din is mistaken for the Sultan and is killed. Eventually the Sultan wins the battle and forgives Ain-ul-Mulk. A conspiracy against the Sultan is afoot.

The scene opens in the palace with Shihab-ud-din reading a few letters. The Sultan's Stepmother comes in and expresses her satisfaction at the way he has looked after Delhi in the absence of the Sultan.

Shihab-ud-din's adopted brother Ratansingh comes in from the front and tells them the Sultan has come back and that Sheikh Imam-ud-din has been killed.

The Sultan who comes in soon after along with Najib and Barani is very grave at the death of the Sheikh and describes how deeply affected he was when his dead body was brought into his tent. He announces that Delhi will observe the following day as mourning for the Sheikh and that there will be no victory celebrations.

As for Ain-ul-Mulk, the Sultan tells them that he had forgiven him, much to the dismay of both Najib and his Stepmother. He explains that Ain-ul-Mulk took just half a minute to discover a flaw in the problem of chess that he thought he had solved, which pleased the Sultan mightily and he forgave him. He also gave him back his kingdom and promised not to send him to Deccan. This gesture wins the approval of Barani who admires the Sultan for his courage. The Sultan then leaves along with Najib, Barani and his Stepmother.

Left alone with his adopted brother Shihab-ud-din, Ratansingh calls the Sultan an 'honest scoundrel' and shares with him the real story of the engagement with Ain-ul-Mulk and how the Sheikh got killed in the action.

When he saw him at Kanauj, the Sultan wasn't particularly pleased. The following day he found himself posted in the front rank of the platoon, which almost always means certain death. The Sheikh approached Ain-ul-Mulk in full royal splendour sitting on an elephant as an emissary of peace and stopped a hundred yards from the enemy, looking very much like the Sultan. Just then a trumpeter from their own side sounded the charge and the battle was on. The enemy thought that the Sheikh was the Sultan himself and after killing him they tried to chase them. This led to a bloody massacre and an eventual defeat of Ain-ul-Mulk. As for the Sultan himself, he had been hiding behind some hills with the rest of the army.

We need to watch every move made by the Sultan. Do you now see the whole point of sending the rebellious Sheikh who is also a look-alike of the Sultan to Kanauj? The calculations of both Najib and the Sultan prove to be true. The enemy takes the Sheikh to be the Sultan himself and they kill him and thinking that they have killed him, pursue them, which leads to a terrible massacre and eventual defeat. An astute, clever move that checkmates both Ain-ul-Mulk and the Sheikh.

Before going Ratansingh informs Shihab that the nobles of the court and important citizens of Delhi were holding a secret meeting — we are not told about what — and that he had accepted an invitation to attend it. Ratansingh believes that his adopted brother might also like to join them because the Sultan had tried to kill him off. At this Shihab turns pale.

Exercises/Questions

1. Who calls the Sultan 'an honest scoundrel'? And why? Is that a correct reading of the Sultan's character? How does the Sultan's conduct here square up with his professions of idealism earlier in Scene Three?
2. Ratansingh says: 'A Sultan's scowl is a terrible thing'. What does he mean by it?
3. Why does the Sultan order a day of mourning for Sheikh Imam-ud-din?
4. Why does Shihab-ud-din turn pale at the invitation from his adopted brother to attend a meeting of the rebels?

SCENE FIVE

The conspirators persuade a reluctant Shihab-ud-din to lead the conspiracy and at the suggestion of Ratansingh decide to kill the Sultan while he is praying.

This scene deals with the Amirs and Sayyids trying to persuade Shihab-ud-din to lead the conspiracy. He is an outsider and as such an ideal person to lead the conspirators.

He repeatedly says no and tells them of the good things that the Sultan has done and agrees to throw in his lot with them for public reasons.

The scene lays bare the motives of the conspirators. The Amirs are upset at having to leave Delhi, which is their home and where they are strong. Moreover Daulatabad is a Hindu city and they will be helpless there. Then they are required to pay far too many taxes. As one of them unselfconsciously says, 'You can't even cheat without your having to pay for it'.

Sheikh Shams-ud-din Tajuddarfim, a venerable old man, seems to be the only man from Delhi who is genuinely concerned about the welfare of the people and the growing tyranny of the Sultan's rule. He gives several instances of the Sultan's tyranny including the death of Sheikh Imam-ud-din. In reply Shihab-ud-din says that if the Sultan is responsible for that death, the Amirs and the people of Delhi are no less responsible for it. They were too cowardly to attend the public meeting he was to address. At this the old Sheikh uncovers the Sultan's designs and explains how the Sultan's soldiers had orders to prevent citizens of Delhi from reaching the auditorium. He shows Shihab a wound that he himself had received on his shoulders in trying to go to the meeting. When Shihab says that the Sultan has done him no harm, he appeals to him not to think of himself but about the people. Ratansingh also joins the others in persuading him.

At this stage Ratansingh unfolds a scheme to murder the Sultan during compulsory prayers. Even the soldiers have to lay down their arms while praying. Ironically, the god-fearing Sheikh who had tried to exhort Shihab for the killing now pleads with him not to agree to the sacrilege. But Shihab can't withdraw now. It is too late. They start working out the details.

Exercises/Questions

1. Does this scene ring a bell in your mind? Doesn't it remind you of a similar scene in Julius Caesar? Conspirators everywhere, it seems, have to look for a leader who has no personal axe to grind.
2. What makes the conspirators choose Shihab-ud-din as a leader?
3. What are the good things that Shihab says about the Sultan?
4. Note the use of the motif of prayer here and at other places in the play.
5. Can you see any hint in the scene that will lead to the failure of the conspiracy?

SCENE SIX

The conspiracy is defeated. The leader, Shihab-ud-din, is ruthlessly stabbed by the Sultan himself.

It is a powerful scene full of tension. Knowing about the conspiracy as we do, we watch the goings-on with bated breath. Barani notices that both the Sultan and Najib are tense and at this stage we suspect that they know about the conspiracy. But though they behave with great self-restraint, the Sultan's impatience and fury come through increasingly as the scene progresses.

The Amirs come in and the Sultan informs them with obvious warmth that a descendent of the Abbasid Khalifs, Ghiyas-ud-din Muhammad is coming to India. Shihab-ud-din compliments the king on his 'wisdom' — a word to which the Sultan objects. He says that he has invited him not to 'placate the stupid priests', as he puts it.

The Sultan then asks a question about what lends legitimacy to his kingship, which shows the big hiatus that exists between the Sultan and the conspirators.

Am I a king only because I am the son of a king? Or is it because I can make the people accept my laws and the army move to my commands? Or can self-confidence alone justify it? I ask you — all of you — what would you have me do to become a real king in your eyes? (Silence)

The conspirators have no answer to this and they all keep silent. The Sultan then explains that until he has the answer, he has to continue to rule but that he is not happy. He adds that he is turning to history and tradition to seek an answer and seek the blessings of the Abbasid Khalif.

The Sultan's responses bring out his increasing impatience at the opposition of the people and the Amirs to his policies. When Shihab implores the Sultan not to take the capital to Daulatabad, he says his empire cannot flourish from Delhi as his capital and then adds: 'But how can I explain tomorrow to those who haven't even opened their eyes to the light of today'? Later he makes a fervent speech asking the Amirs to trust him and cooperate in the building of new future for India and ends by melodramatically kneeling before them. The entire scene is meant to discredit the conspirators. To use the metaphor from chess, they are checkmated.

The Sultan's vengeful fury against Shihab-ud-din is well-founded. He had sent for him to assist Najib in administering the state in his absence, which shows that he fully trusted him. He is furious to discover that that very man should betray him. The additional stabs that he gives to Shihab's body after Shihab has died not only show his deep frustration but also his cruelty. When the kind-hearted Barani covers his face with cloth, the Sultan removes it saying that people should see the wounds. Obviously he wants Shihab's death to be an object lesson for all against treachery.

But if the Sultan is furious, he knows how to turn adverse events to his advantage. This is clear from his directions on handling Shihab's treachery. It will be given out that there was a rebellion in the palace and that Shihab had died a martyr's death in trying to save the Sultan.

The conspiracy has another fallout. He now orders that people should start moving to Daulatabad within a fortnight. His statement — Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now — reveals how he is now bent upon implementing his ideas ruthlessly in spite of all opposition.

Exercises/Questions

1. Why does Barani sob at the end of the scene? Account for his behaviour throughout the scene.
2. The exposure of the conspiracy has been deftly handled. There is a similar scene in Henry V. An important item in this respect is the sense of timing. Do you agree?
3. What is your own response to the Sultan's behaviour in this scene?
4. The motifs of prayer and chess are employed most clearly in this scene.

Public Announcement about Shifting to Daulatabad.

The public announcement after the failure of the conspiracy is on expected lines'. When the Sultan had addressed the people in the first scene, he had said: 'This is an invitation, not an order. Only those who have faith in me may come with me'. Now he leaves the citizens of Delhi no choice: 'within the next month every citizen must leave for Daulatabad'. (italics added)

It must however be added that the Sultan says he has taken care of all the needs of the people including their medical needs.

The remaining seven scenes of the play are set either on the way from Delhi to Daulatabad, in the hills or in Daulatabad itself.

[Part Two]

SCENE SEVEN

The scene between Aziz, an officer in the Sultan's employ in the guise of a Brahmin and Aazam gives us an idea of the privations of the people during the transfer of the capital. The introduction of copper currency gives Aziz ideas.

The purpose of the scene is chiefly informative. The tension of the previous scenes is over. The officers entrusted with providing facilities during the shifting of the capital are corrupt and the poor suffer. With copper currency replacing the silver currency Aziz thinks of making counterfeit coins.

Aziz's comments on the emerging new profession of politics are highly relevant — to these times as they were to the sixties when the play was written. Politics, he says, was full of brainless people but could ensure 'wealth, success, position, power'. Compared to the god-fearing Aazam, Aziz is a hard-boiled villain and will lose no opportunity to make money.

Comments/Questions

1. Read this scene with Scene One when the duo first makes their appearance.
2. Do you agree with Aziz's estimate of politicians?
3. There is a bit of humour too. Can you pick out an example of it?
4. With people like Aziz as officers or as profiteers what do you think are the chances of success of the new measures?

SCENE EIGHT

The Sultan besieged by insurrections is in conversation with Barani and looks for a solution for his harassed kingdom.

The scene is midnight at the fort at Daulatabad five years later in A.D.1332. It opens with a conversation between two sentries in which they talk about the new fort and the road from Delhi to Daulatabad. Also, the old sentry from Delhi reminisces about his family and the losses he suffered on the way.

This preliminary conversation is meant to serve as a prelude to a serious conversation between the sleepless Sultan and Barani. The Sultan is a troubled soul, restless and in need of company, any company. The young sentry reminds him of his own youth years ago and so obsessed is he with his past dreams that he talks about them to the young sentry before Barani comes. He particularly shares with him his memory of a mystical moment one night at the fort (when he was twenty-one) when the torch burning nearby, the half built gate, the fort and the sky all melted and merged and flowed into his blood stream. That moment has gone forever. The Sultan has been trying to recapture that mystical moment but has been unable to do so. When the sentry confesses that he hasn't understood him, he turns away from him in disgust. This conversation underscores the fact of the growing lack of communication of the Sultan with the world.

The Sultan confesses his restlessness to Barani and asks him to prescribe a medicine for what he calls his 'honeycomb of diseases'. Poetry no longer interests him. There are several uprisings one after the other. The new copper currency has turned every Hindu home into a domestic mint. The drought in Doab is spreading from town to town. He can't trust anyone except Ain-ul-Mulk and Shihab's father. Barani tells him that he belongs in the ranks of learned men, not in 'the market of corpses'. The Sultan responds by saying that he is too engrossed in the struggle to withdraw.

The Sultan does some soul-searching. But he doesn't like to admit that he has been in the wrong. Barani emboldened by the Sultan's confidence accuses him of going back on his ideals and of heedlessly indulging in bloodshed. He, however, persists in believing that he has done no wrong and that he has 'something to give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history but I have to do it within this life'. Apparently this self-belief is what keeps him going.

Just then he receives the news of another calamity — the murder of the loyal Vizier Najib.

Exercises/Questions

1. The Sultan accuses every Hindu home of being a domestic mint. But so far as this play is concerned it is Aziz who is shown to be a criminal in this respect. Knowing him as we do, he must be among the biggest makers of counterfeit currency.
2. Pick out the sentences that present the Sultan as a visionary.
3. The process of alienation of the Sultan from others is on.
4. Who killed Najib? It should be easy for you to identify the killer?
5. How would you describe Barani's relationship with the Sultan? Is he disillusioned with the Sultan?
6. The Sultan has fallen from his ideals and his fall has been steep. Does he still command the sympathy of the audience/readers?
7. How does this scene prepare you for what is to follow?

SCENE NINE

Aziz is another pretender to power. He kills Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid who is on way to Daulatabad and decides to go in his place.

The scene is in a hideout in the hills. It introduces us to an uncommon crook who we have met before and who now aspires to power.

Aziz has obviously given up his disguise of being a Brahmin and instead he and Aazam now rob travellers of their money. But Aziz's sights are set much higher. He is sick of running and hiding. He wants to be able 'to rob a man and then stay there to punish him for getting robbed', as he puts it. He wants power. When Aazam suggests he could be 'a court thief', he is simply delighted.

Soon an opportunity presents itself in the form of Ghiyas-ud-din, a descendent of the Abbasid Kalifs. He is brought before them bound hand and foot by mistake. This gives him the idea that he could go to Daulatabad in his place. Ghiyas-ud-din is remorselessly killed and Aziz dances with joy at the opening palace doors.

Exercises/Questions

1. Do you notice any growth in Aziz's character?
2. What is the point of the scene? Does Aziz's bid for power suggest a parallel to the Sultan's wresting of power after the murder of his father and brother? Is this scene meant to be an ironic contrast to the Sultan's quest for power?
3. Pick out lines that suggest Aziz's love for power.
4. How does he express his joy at the idea of going to Daulatabad in place of the descendent of the Khalif?

SCENE TEN

The Stepmother admits having murdered Najib; is sentenced to be stoned to death. This highly dramatic scene takes place between the Sultan and his Stepmother, with Barani coming in at the end.

The scene shows how the move for a new copper currency has misfired with people having taken to minting copper coins on a large scale. When the Stepmother draws his attention to the cartloads of copper coins outside the palace, he expresses his helplessness saying that they will not go to the treasury but will be heaped up in the new rose garden. This use of the rose garden will mean the death of one of his dreams. His chief worry now is to find out who murdered Najib.

It is an intimate scene in which both the Sultan and the Stepmother uncover their secret selves to each other. At first she tries to worm out whatever information he has about the murderer and adds that it was a good riddance, for in her view he was leading the Sultan 'astray'. Later she confesses that it was she who had killed him saying that 'it was easier than killing one's father and brother' and it was 'better than killing Sheikh Imam-ud-din'. She then explains that she killed Najib because it was he who was driving him to murders (Look at your kingdom now. It's become a kitchen of death — 'all because of him'.)

The Sultan of course cannot believe her and explodes into admitting that he had killed them but had done so for an ideal. But he also confesses to have suffered for those killings. Lately Najib too had been telling him to hold back his sword. But he has not been able to do so. After the killing of Shihab, he seems to have realized that 'not words but the sword — that's all I have to keep my faith in my mission'. His killings, he says, had a purpose — they gave him what he wanted — 'power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act'. But her killing has not only been futile, but it has led to his astounding discovery that she also wanted power, power to control him. He says he had only three friends in the world — Najib, Barani and the Stepmother. Now he feels betrayed by her — '...I love you more than I have loved anyone in my life'. In his uncontrollable fury he sentences her to death by stoning, a punishment awarded to adulteress.

This is a scene of great power because it lays bare the tortured soul of Muhammad in all its complexity — its sense of mission, its hunger for power and his growing need to resort to violence.

The scene also highlights the essential loneliness anguish of a man of power whose hands are red with blood and his need for a power greater than his own. That is why he falls down on his knees, makes a confession and prays to God for mercy.

Barani's entry brings to the Sultan's mind that by praying he is violating his own injunction not to pray. But Barani gives him what he considers to be the joyful news that Ghiyas-ud-din, a desecendent of the Abbasid Kalifs is reaching there within the coming month. But the Sultan is not cheered by the news and is torn apart by his gnawing, growing guilt.

Exercises/Questions

1. Can you pick up any lines that show some trace of poetry in the Sultan?

2. Why lesson does the Sultan learn from killing Shihab?
3. Why did the Sultan want power?
4. Why does the Sultan consider his stepmother to be 'worse than an adulteress'?
5. Note the prayer motif again. Why does he say he was trying to pray but the words left no echo in the heart?

Announcement

The public announcement describes Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid as a saviour and signals the restarting of prayer. The desperation behind the need for the blessing of a descendent of a Kalif is clear. But of course the hope is stillborn.

SCENE ELEVEN

The imposter Aziz is recognized during the ceremonial welcome of the descendent of the Kalif. The starving crowd breaks into a riot.

The scene is set on a plain outside the fort of Daulatabad. It is a crowd scene in which we see the people asking for food and not prayer. They have no use of prayer. The discontent shows no signs of abating and leads to food rioting at the end.

The Sultan stares at Aziz and it seems that he doesn't quite recognize him. But whatever be his private thoughts, he goes through the motions of receiving the descendent of a Kalif. His last sentence shows his hopeless hope: 'Only you can save me now, Your Holiness, the dust of your feet on my head can save me now'.

While the Sultan fails to recognize Aziz, the Hindu woman of Scene Seven does and shouts but as always no one pays much heed to her.

Incidentally, Aziz is a totally imagined character. Ironically, while his fortune is rising, that of the Sultan is on the decline.

SCENE TWELVE

Aazam, the more timid of the two imposters, develops cold feet and wants to run away from the city of starving people.

The scene is the palace.

Aazam who is supposed to be the disciple of Ghiyas-ud-din wants to run away to safety and has actually ordered two horses to be brought. He has been to the city and gives a harrowing report of the weeklong food riots in the city — violence, heaps of corpses, burning houses. Aziz is still unconvinced and wants to stay on to enjoy the taste of power.

Aazam also draws a graphic picture of the Sultan digging his fists into the heaps of counterfeit coins and letting them trickle out from his raised fists.

Finally Aazam goes out himself.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Barani seeks the Sultan's permission to leave on the pretext of attending his mother's funeral. He sees through Aziz's fraud and forgives him and speaks of his plan to go back to Delhi.

The scene is set in another part of the palace. It opens with the Sultan in conversation with Barani. Later Aziz is brought in.

The gentle Barani seeks the Sultan's permission to go away to attend his mother's funeral. She has been a victim of the riots, though he hasn't said anything about it to the Sultan. When the Sultan asks him if he will come back, he keeps quiet. His reluctance to return is clear. Barani's departure will leave him without sound advice or a restraining hand.

Aazam Jahan's death is reported. When Aziz is called, he frankly owns up to what he is — a dhobi from Shiknar. Unabashedly, he tells of his career of crime saying that he has been the Sultan's 'true disciple' — a dhobi disguised as a Brahmin, officer on the way to Daulatabad, maker of counterfeit currency, farmer in Doab, robber in the hills, and finally a descendent of the Abbasid Kalifs. As a state servant who handled corpses of important people, he says that he had a revelation once: 'One day, suddenly I had a revelation. This was all human life was worth, I said. This was the real meaning of the mystery of death — straw and skin!'

Muhammad is particularly struck by his reply about the revelation that he has had about the mystery of death in his new mood of resignation of a man who finds himself driven into corner: 'Sweep your logic away into a corner, Barani, all I need now is myself and my madness — madness to prance in a field eaten bare by the scarecrow violence. ... I have a Companion to share my madness now — the Omnipotent God'. So while the otherwise soft Barani calls for the direst punishment for Aziz, the king forgives him. The Sultan also tells Barani of his plan to return to Delhi.

The play closes on a beautiful sombre note. The Sultan is tired and wants to sleep. He asks Barani to pray for him before he goes. Soon he falls asleep. An attendant comes and wraps a shawl round him. Just then the Muezzin's call for prayer is heard. The attendant stops but decides not to wake him up. After the Muezzin's call fades away, the Sultan suddenly opens his eyes and looks around dazed. It is as if his unconscious had nudged him awake at prayer time.

There was a time when he didn't have time to sleep. Now he is so dead tired that he goes to sleep just before prayer time. It is touching to see a thoughtful servant preferring to let the Sultan sleep even when it is near prayer time. The suggestion is that natural needs are far more important than political necessity.

Exercises/Questions

1. Why does the Sultan want to restart public prayers?
2. The Sultan uses the chess metaphor in the scene. Can you spot where?
3. What is your final impression of the Sultan?
4. Why doesn't Barani want to come back?
5. In what sense are the Sultan and Aziz alike?

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In spite of his many forays into the world of film and television and also in that of cultural administration, Girish Karnad remains deeply committed to playwriting. His themes chiefly drawn from myth and folktales and history have been an attempt to define the Indianness of Indian theatre.

The most obvious reason for Karnad's choice for writing a play on Tughlaq was the contemporaneity of Tughlaq's history. As he said in an interview in *Enact* in 1971, 'here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi…and also one of the greatest failures'. According to U.R. Anantha Murthy 'the play reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country'.(Introduction to Tughlaq) While this general statement is true to an extent, it needs further, closer examination.

The critical commentary on *Tughlaq* has also, we are sure, enabled you to see Girish Karnad's dramatic artistry at close quarters and prepared you to see the play as a whole and discuss the structure of the play, its theme and the motifs of chess, prayer and performance used in it.

2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Karnad, Girish. *Three Plays: Naga-mandala, Hayavadana, Tughlaq*. New Delhi: Oxford, 1994; Oxford paperbacks 1995; rpt. 2004. [includes an 18-page long Author's Introduction]

Karnad, Girish.*Tughlaq*. New Delhi: Oxford.

Dodiya, Jaydipsinh., ed. *The Plays of Girish Karnad: Critical Perspectives*. New Delhi: Prestige, 1999. [Contains 7 essays on *Tughlaq*]

UNIT 3 *TUGHLAQ* : STRUCTURE, THEMES AND MOTIFS

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Plot Structure
  3.1.1 The Sequencing of the Scenes
3.2 The Theme of Power and its Tragic Misuse
3.3 Symbols/motifs used in the Play
  3.3.1 Chess
  3.3.2 Prayer
  3.3.3 Disguise and Resemblance as Dramatic Devices
  3.3.4 Theatrical Images
    3.3.4.1 Performance
3.4 Let Us Sum Up
3.5 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall discuss the plot structure of *Tughlaq*, the sequencing of the scenes followed by a discussion of the focal theme, symbols/motifs and the dramatic devices that make *Tughlaq* a well structured play. After reading the unit you will be able to appreciate the play's everlasting appeal.

3.1 PLOT STRUCTURE

Tughlaq has been described as a well-structured play. Rajendra Paul calls it a beautifully structured play. The scenes, he says, are so juxtaposed that 'you are not allowed to be either carried away by your hatred towards Tughlaq for his Machiavellian machinations or by your sympathy or admiration for his idealism'. (*Enact*: May 1973) The scene placement is entirely functional. As Rajinder Paul has pointed out, 'Each scene is like a brick serving a particular role and helping in the total structure'. The scenes are necessarily episodic but they all converge on to producing a complex picture of the Sultan as it evolves during the five years of his rule shown in the play. The key figure in the play is of course the Sultan and the principal focus is on him and his policies. But it is also important for the audience for us to know what the common people and the nobility think about him.

3.1.1 The Sequencing of Scenes

The structuring of the play was influenced by Parsi theatre. In this respect Girish Karnad's own comments are illuminating. According to him, the Parsi model demanded a succession of shallow and deep scenes. The shallow scenes gave prominence to lower characters and were comic and were supposed to be played in the street represented by the foreground of the stage. The deep scenes set in palaces and royal parks featured important characters. The spatial division, Karnad says, was 'ideal to show the gulf between the rulers and the ruled, between the mysterious inner chambers of power politics and the open, public areas of those affected by it. But, as the writer points out, as he wrote the play he found it difficult to maintain what he called 'the accepted balance between these two regions': 'Writing in an unprecented situation, where the mass populace was exercising political franchise , in however clumsy a fashion, for the first time in its history, I found the shallow scenes bulging with an energy hard to control'. The deep scenes, he says, became emptier as the play progressed. And 'the comic lead' Aziz appeared 'at par with the protagonist himself'. This, he says, was 'the result of the anarchy which climaxed Tughlaq's time'.

As a historical play its canvas is wide and there is a large variety of characters and places represented in it. Out of a total of thirteen scenes as many as seven are set in the palace. Five scenes are in the open. The conspiracy scene (Scene Five), which is the thirteenth scene, is necessarily set outside the palace; it takes place in a house in Delhi. Roughly, the scenes in the palace alternate with the scenes in the open. The scenes in the open generally have common characters but this is not true for Scene 3 which takes place outside the Big Mosque but which shows the Sultan in conversation with Sheikh Imam-un-din. On the other hand Scene Twelve is set in the palace but presents commoners Aazam and Aziz talking to each other. It is only in the last scene that the two worlds — the world of the royalty and the world of common men come together.

The alternation of scenes provides variety and sustains readers'/audience interest and avoids long stretches of tension.

The first six scenes deal chiefly with the Sheikh Imam-ud-din's open revolt against the Sultan. His 'management' of both Ain-ul-Mulk and the Sheikh is the work of master strategist.

The remaining scenes show us the gradual decline of the state into chaos. Scene seven shows the privations of the people on way to Daulatabad and the way how parasites like Azis and Aazam plan to fatten themselves on the miseries of the poor.

Scene eight is set at Daulatabad and shows Barani suggesting to Muhammad to abdicate and keep the company of the learned. But Muhammad finds himself excessively embroiled in the affairs of the state to withdraw. Of the remaining five scenes only one scene deals with Muhammad and his Stepmother. This is also the most tense scene in the second half of the play. The remaining four are concerned with the tricksters Azim and Aazam — Scene Nine, Scene Eleven (Aziz in disguise) and Scene Twelve. Aziz also figures very prominently in Scene Thirteen. This is an alarming number of scenes to be given to Aziz and Aazam but as Girish Karnad himself points out, the ascendancy of Aziz is an index of the decline of the state into chaos. Barani is the last friend to leave Tughlaq never to return and his departure is significant. Equally significant is the fact that Muhammad has already acquired a new kind of lieutenant in the form of Aziz — he is soon to be an officer of the state. One can imagine what the state of affairs is going to be when the people begin their long weary march back to Delhi.

3.2 THEME OF POWER AND ITS TRAGIC MISUSE

A major theme in Girish Karnad's play *Tughlaq* is inevitably power. Bertrand Russell said in his *Power: A New Social Analysis* that power is the capacity to achieve intended results. It will be worthwhile exploring how Tughlaq used the power that he had acquired and why he failed to achieve the results that he had set out to do in the first instance. Tughlaq is unusually self-reflexive about kingship and the authority that it gave him. And our enquiry would hopefully give us an interesting glimpse into the psyche of a medieval king who would be different.

There are at least two Tughlaqs in the play and accordingly two faces of power. One of them was a visionary who had dreams to fulfill for his people; the other was a pragmatic politician whose entire politics was based on considerations other than morality or ideology. We shall deal with the idealistic Tughlaq first.

Tughlaq wanted to be different from the Sultans that had ascended the throne of Delhi, who wanted to use power for the people and thus rewrite history. Later he says that he killed his father and elder brother for 'an ideal', so that he could have 'power, strength to shape my thoughts, strength to act, strength to recognize myself'.(Scene Ten: 204) Read the following exchange between Muhammad and his Stepmother.

Muhammad:	… I am not worried about my enemies. I'm only worried about my people. (italics added)
Stepmother:	Pompous ass! As though other kings didn't do that.
Muhammad:	No, they didn't. Look at the past Sultans of Delhi. They couldn't bear the weight of their crowns. They couldn't leave it aside. So they died senile in their youth or were murdered. (156-57)

This Tughlaq was a dreamer with the soul of a poet. In his imaginative moods he likes to soar high into the sky and contemplates a state in which he finds himself addressing his people to share their joys and sorrows with him:

….I want to climb up, up, up to the top of the tallest tree in the world, and call out to my people: "Come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me your worries. Let me share your joys. Let's laugh and cry together and then let's pray".

He goes further and imagines a sort of mystical union with them:

'Let's pray till our bodies melt and flow and our blood turns into air. History is ours to play with — ours now….Come! I am waiting to embrace you all!' (Scene Two: 155)

At a more mundane level Muhammad wanted to be an architect of a new secular and progressive India without distinction between Hindus and Muslims:

'My beloved people, you have heard the judgment of the kazi and seen for yourself how justice works in my kingdom — without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. My this moment …light up our path our path towards greater justice, equality, progress and peace…not just peace but a more purposeful life'. (Scene One: 149)

Tughlaq's self-reflexivity about power shows that he is aware of the responsibilities of a ruler. In Scene Six, faced with rebellion from the Amirs, he raises the question of the legitimacy of power:

'I have been asking myself just one question. I am a king. I wear the royal robes. I have honoured myself with the title of Sultan. But what gives me the right to call myself a king? (The Amirs are baffled.) Am I a king because I am the son of a king? Or is it because I can make the people accept my laws and the army move to my commands? Or can self-confidence alone justify it? I ask you — all of you — what would you have me do to become a real king in your eyes? (Silence)…You are all silent. The others only tell me what I should not do but what I should. Until I know what else to do, Shihab-ud-din I have to go on clutching the scepter in my fist. But I am not happy'. (Scene Six: 181)

Muhammad is furious with the Amirs and the questions that he is putting to them are not questions to which he is not really seeking an answer but clearly he is conscious about the need for legitimizing the power of even a hereditary ruler and also that the ultimate legitimacy lies in a commitment to the people.

The more familiar Tughlaq is one that sees power as a game of chess in which there is someone who wins and someone who loses and the whole effort is to stay in power and if possible to enhance it. Naturally the politics followed was based on practical rather than moral or ideological considerations or what has come to be known as realpolitik. This is the more familiar face of power and Tughlaq can be seen doing what rulers have always done.

Chess as a game and later as a metaphor for political manoeuvring first occurs in Scene Two and at several places openly or implicitly till the end. The way Tughlaq aided by the wily Najib uses low cunning and deception to get rid of the troublesome Sheikh Imam-ud-din and also solves the problem posed by Ain-ul-Mulk with one master move could be called , to use the terminology of the game, checkmate. Another brilliant example of checkmating is furnished by the turning of the tables on the rebellious Amirs led by Shihab-ud-din.

For all his idealism Tughlaq cannot reconcile the two selves in him, the dream and the reality. We can see the idealist Tughlaq slipping into his more practical counterpart. Read this exchange:

Muhammad: So, Najib. What do you propose?

Najib: I can't think of anything right now, Your Majesty — except that the Sheikh has a striking resemblance to you. (Muhammad, startled, stares at Najib.)

Barani: What has the Sheikh got to do with this?

Muhammad: (Slowly) You are a devil, Najib! (Pause. Then briskly) Good. W'll think about that…. (Scene Two: 159-60)

Later, Muhammad, conscious of Barani's praise of 'his courage, honesty and justice' is compelled to explain:

Muhammad: Forgive me if I let you down, Barani, *but I must play this game my own way* …. (160) (italics added)

And 'my own way' means doing what is dictated by realpolitik, resorting to low cunning and deception so that the Sheikh could be eliminated.

Tughlaq fails in his mission for several reasons. First, he is not able to reconcile the two faces of power in his mental make-up. Moreover, the visionary in him gets mired in self-righteousness. He has an outsize ego and he acts from a settled conviction that he alone is right. This together with his impatience in getting quick results makes him intolerant of criticism and dissent. A favourite scheme of his that became an idée fixe with him was the transfer of the Capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. This is also the major cause of the rebellion led by Shihab-ud-din. His self-righteousness becomes clear in his handling of the rebellion. When Shihab points out that the people of Delhi were very unhappy with the transfer, he says: 'I have explained every reason to them, shown how my empire cannot flourish with Delhi as its capital. But how can I explain tomorrow to those who haven't opened their eyes to the light of today? Let's not waste more time over that. They'll see the point soon'. (Scene Six: 180-81) He of course proceeds to crush the rebellion with an iron hand without bothering either to probe the causes of the rebellion or assessing the mood of the people. He is convinced about the rightness of the step and according to him that should be enough for everybody.

His continuing to stab Shihab long after he is dead brings his cruelty and vindictiveness to the surface. This vindictiveness assumes a more generalized form when we see the ruler who had invited the people of Delhi to go to Daulatabad voluntarily (Scene One: 149) now orders them to leave immediately (Scene Six: 185-86).

Muhammad: Najib, I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad within a fortnight. I was too soft. I can see that now. They'll understand the whip. Everyone must leave. *Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi.* (italics added)

He will now use naked power as an instrument of exemplary punishment. When Barani spreads a silken cloth over Shihab's face, Muhammad prevents him saying: 'Don't cover him, Barani. I want my people to see his wounds' (186).

This is a key scene in another way. His prohibition of prayers indicates another feature of his exercise of power — its arbitrary nature. The reason he gives is that 'our prayers too are ridden with disease, and must be exiled'. The reference apparently is to the association of prayer with murder from which he has escaped. But the whimsical nature of the interdiction cannot be questioned.

This scene then marks a watershed in the career of Muhammad. Commitment to an ideal which included commitment to the people was what had justified even the murder of his father and brother in his own eyes but the same Muhammad is well on his way to a complete estrangement from the people.

In the latter half of the play we have a glimpse of Muhammad's use of power which is punitive and which is both arbitrary and excessive. In Scene Eight Barani who manages to tell Muhammad the truth about himself says: 'Your Majesty, there was a time when you believed in love, in peace, in God. What has happened to those ideals? You won't let your subjects pray. You torture them for the smallest offence. Hang them on suspicion. Why this bloodshed? Please stop it, and I promise Your Majesty something better will emerge out of it' (196).

But he doesn't turn back, he cannot turn back. This shows the addictive nature of power, particularly when there is no morality to restrain, to use Bertrand Russell's words, 'anarchic self-assertion'. There is only one occasion when he questions the punishment that he has inflicted on others — to kill his Stepmother by stoning for killing Najib. : 'Why am I become a pig rolling in this gory mud?' This is part of the prayer that he tries to offer but cannot.

I think his growing emotional isolation has also something to do with his addiction to violence. His mother doesn't talk to him. Barani is a trusted friend but his advice often doesn't suit him. The only person who had an emotional hold on him and who could have exercised a restraining influence on his is his Stepmother and he feared she was trying to rival him. Bereft of all friends, Muhammad has only his 'madness to prance in a field eaten bare by the scarecrow violence'. (Scene Thirteen: 220)

We have a third, perhaps a more contemporary face of power too in the play, illustrated through the spectacular rise of Aziz. From a dhobi he becomes a revered state guest who is welcomed as a descendent of the Abbasid Khalifs and who is supposed to purify the land and restart the banned prayers. There are two aspects of Aziz's aspiration to power. First, he graduates from money to power. A remark by Bertrand Russell in his introduction to Power: A New Social Analysis illuminates this graduation: 'When a moderate degree of comfort is assured, both individuals and communities will pursue power rather than wealth…' In the beginning he wants money and becomes a robber. A stage comes in his career of the petty criminal when mere wealth doesn't satisfy him and he wants power ('I am bored stiff with all this running and hiding. You rob a man, you run and hide. It's all so pointless. One should be able to rob a man and the stay there to punish him for getting robbed. That's called 'class' — that's being a real king'.) (198) (Italics added)

Second, Aziz wants power for self-indulgence, for what it will get him. Muhammad wanted power to fulfill his dreams for the country and the people. But he has no such pretensions. He wants to enjoy having and exercising power and all the other luxuries that it will bring. During his journey to Daulatabad he tells his friend Aazam that he has 'discovered a whole new world [of politics] — wealth, success, position and power'. (Scene Seven: 190) He manages to acquire this position and power through all possible means with no holds barred and is very brazen about it. In that sense Aziz has a contemporary touch about him. He murders Ghiyas-ud-din, a descendent of the Abbasid Khalifs, who is on his way to the new capital at the invitation of the Sultan and is received at the palace with great deference. The imposture is discovered but the crowning irony of the play comes when Muhammad has to continue to connive at this masquerade. This seems to suggest that the Sultan cannot disown the mirror image of himself. Aziz is the bitter harvest he has produced and he must reap it. Aziz represents power at its ugliest.

3.3 SYMBOLS/MOTIFS USED IN THE PLAY

Girish Karnad, in this play, has used some symbols which are not literary but theatrical symbols. They form integral parts of the play's action. Disguise and resemblance and Muhammad's sleeplessness are such symbols. The play begins with the disguise of Aziz, who comes at the end of the play as Ghiyas-ud-din. Sheikh Immam-ud-din is killed while he goes in disguise. Disguise is a very effective symbol for hypocrisy, role-playing and also imitation. Muhammad's sleeplessness is indicative of his vigilance a price a politician cannot help paying. Muhammad sleeps only at the end when all his energies are exhausted.

But the most important symbol is that of the game of chess. Muhammad is seen in scene two playing chess and thinking of defeating his friend. But here the game of chess is a part of dramatic action. But the whole play imitates the structure of the game of chess. Muhammad, like the king of the chessboard, moves towards the centre of the board for his safety by shifting his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. Aziz, like a pawn also moves towards the centre. If the king moves down the pawn moves up and the king ultimately is checkmated by the pawn. The king cannot be killed, but can only be checkmated.

Satyadeo Dube, the well-known director, has something meaningful to say about this play. In a paper on contemporary Indian drama, he said that the characters of modern Indian drama do not measure up to the characters of Ibsen and Strindberg because of the historical and sociological circumstances. The only exception, Dube writes, "which immediately comes to my mind is Girish Karnad's Tughlaq. This play...has in the character of Tughlaq a depth of exploration which can stand up to quite a few great characters created in the western theatre". These remarks neatly sum up the achievement of the play. The character of Sultan Muhammad is a sure index of the development of dramatic consciousness in Indian theatre.

3.3.1 Chess

Life, particularly political life, has often been compared to chess. Muhammad Tughlaq is represented in the play as an accomplished chess-player. It is only appropriate therefore that the chess metaphor should play an important part in the play. When Scene Two opens, Muhammad is seen playing chess solo. He has just solved the greatest problem in chess and is excited over it. Soon with the help of Najib he is going to solve the problem posed by Ain-ul-Mulk. That is one of the most brilliant moves made by the Muhammad — Najib duo for not only do they get rid of the troublesome Sheikh Imam-ud-din but also make friends with Ain-ul-Mulk. The other is the forestalling of the conspiracy led by Shihab-ud-din. Here we have a perfect example of checkmating. The conspirators, apparently unstoppable, are checkmated in the nick of time. At this point Muhammad is at the peak of his success.

But his decline has already started. However, the only time Muhammad admits to being checkmated is by Aziz the dhobi from Shiknar. The king has been checkmated by the 'pawn'. The irony is that with all his skill in chess and political manouvring Muhammad's graph of success falls steeply where the Aziz's graph shows a corresponding steep rise. He has murdered Ghiyas-ud-din, the last descendent of the Abbasid Khalifa who was on way to Daulatabad on invitation from the Sultan and has come disguised as Ghiyas-ud-din. Earlier Muhammad and Aziz made their moves separately, their paths touching each other only tangentially. Now they come together and we can only imagine the kinds of moves they will make. The only certainty is that the losers will be the people, who are mere pawns and victims, as they have always been.

3.3.2 Prayer

A major motif in the play is the motif of prayer, which the playwright has woven into the structure of the play. As U.R. Ananthamurthy has pointed out, Karnad's treatment of the motif is unhistorical.

Killing a man at prayer is considered sacrilegious. Witness Hamlet's hesitation in killing Polonius while he is praying. Here was a chance for him to avenge the murder of his father but he spares Claudius's life because killing him while praying would send him to heaven. There is no such misgiving in the minds of the conspirators in Tughlaq.

When Ratansingh lays bare his plan to murder the Sultan while he is praying, it sounds attractive because prayers being compulsory, the whole palace will be unarmed at that time. The only serious objection comes from a man of religion, Sheikh Shamsuddin, who says that it would be sacrilegious; it would pollute the time of prayer which was sacred time. But the objection is overruled. Eventually the conspiracy is uncovered and the Sultan is outraged and gives condign punishment to the conspirators. The irony is that the Sultan has himself been guilty of the same offence when he had his father and brother murdered in order to seize power while they were praying. The dramatic point being made is that Tughlaq's power is corrupt at its very source. In a burst of fury Muhammad bans all prayers. (Scene Six) He had hoped that every act in his kingdom would be a prayer, 'every prayer to become a further step in knowledge, every step to lead us nearer to God'. But he says that their prayers have become diseased and 'must be exiled'. (Scene Six)

It seems that the wheel has come full circle. After five years when Muhammad finds all else failing, he resorts to religion and invites the last descendent of Abbasid Khalifa, Ghiyas-ud-din to come and purify the land. The visit will also mark the restarting of prayers. But the real descendent of the Khalifa, Ghiyas-ud-din has been murdered and it is the murderer Aziz disguised as Ghiyas-ud-din who comes and is received in the palace. It is he who is slated to lead the prayers. Muhammad is shocked at Aziz's brazen confession but he is left with no option but to connive at this public deception. The moral degeneration of authority is complete. Prayers are essential but they have been reduced to a mere empty public gesture, nothing more. The great irony is that Muhammad is offering the people prayers when they actually want food. (Scene Twelve)

We also get a chance to look at prayers from the point of view of personal need. While prayers are banned, there comes a time when Muhammad feels an inner need to pray and calls for divine guidance. But he admits the hardness of his heart and his inability to pray:

'I was trying to pray — but I could only find words learnt by rote which left no echo in the heart. I am tethering on the brink of madness, Barani, but the madness of God still eludes me'. (Scene Ten) This unenviable situation when one desparately need to pray but can't is a measure of the distance Muhammad has traveled on the road to damnation.

The closing moments of Scene Thirteen witness a reversal of sorts. Prayers have restarted and the Muezzin is heard calling the faithful to prayer. But the

Servant realizing that the Sultan's great need to sleep chooses to violate the prayer order and lets him sleep. This simple gesture reestablishes the essential humanity of Muhammad and his vulnerability as a human being.

3.3.3 Disguise and Resemblance as Dramatic Devices

Both disguise and resemblance have been widely used as devices in drama, particularly in comedies. In this play both have been pressed into service for serious purposes.

Resemblance first. Because of the striking resemblance between Sheikh Imam-ud-din and the Sultan, Najib lights upon a plan to kill two birds with one stone. They would be able to buy peace with Ain-ul-Mulk and also get rid of the dangerous Sheikh Imam-ud-din who is proving to be a centre for subversive activities in the state. The plan works perfectly and Sheikh Imam-ud-din gets killed as a result of mistaken identity.

While resemblance is used only for an isolated episode, disguise is employed more centrally. A character puts on disguise to hide, trick or to spy on others. Here Aziz assumes two disguises to trick others — first as Pandit Vishnu Prasad who files a suit against the state and wins it in the first scene; and second as the last descendent of the Abbasid Khalifa, Ghiyas-ud-din whom he has killed and whose robes he has stolen and who arrives in Daulatabad to purify the land in Scene Eleven. Aziz is a dhobi of Shiknar but who is ambitious and who first tries to enrich himself in various ways and later sets his sights at position and power.

On the first occasion no one is able to pierce through his disguise. The suggestion is that he is able to hoodwink the whole people. It is only when his old friend the pickpocket Aazam looks at him closely that he is able to recognize him. At this stage he is intent only on money and they join hands to go for it.

On the second occasion again when Aziz appears as Ghiya-ud-din as the Saviour from the land of the Khalifas, no one is able to see through his disguise – except one Hindu woman who he did not allow to go to look after her sick child while they were on the road to Daulatabad: 'He killed my child! Those eyes … I'll never forget them...he killed my child … (Scene Eleven) But he is properly exposed only by Muhammad himself when he tears the mask from off his face in the last scene of the play: 'Who are you? Who are you? How long do you hope to go on fooling us with your masquerade?' The irony is that in spite of the exposure of Aziz and his subsequent brazen confession of all his villainies, Muhammad has no option but to let him go on with his masquerade. The disguise is off but he sees a close resemblance between Aziz and himself. As he tells Barani: 'All your life you wait for someone who understands you. And then — you meet him — 'Later: 'But I am not alone, Barani. Thank Heaven. For once I am not alone. I have a companion to share my madness now'. (Scene Thirteen)

3.3.4 Theatrical Images

Girish Karnad's Tughlaq deserves a close scrutiny as it highlights one of the fundamental concepts of theatre i.e. that theatre is an illusion, a fleeting shadow, a vision and a dream-like experience. There is a close parallel between life and theatre and quite often life is theatre-like and vice versa. But at no time life is theatre and theatre is life. The thin line of demarcation between good theatre and life is very often not perceived and hence the confusion and misunderstanding that both are the same or both are interchangeable. A skilful playwright, even when he is realistic, makes us conscious: Look here! You are only watching a play. There are several ways of bringing in this awareness into the audience. Girish Karnad uses theatrical images in Tughlaq to achieve an effect that is comparable to the achievement of John Osborne in Luther.

3.3.4.1 Performance

There are many references to acting, theatre, and performance in Tughlaq. Muhammad behaves and speaks like an actor. His public appearance and his private moments are like that of an actor. In the opening scene itself there is a reference to his theatricality. He appears before the crowd properly heralded, and waxes eloquent. He speaks of "justice", "peace", "purposeful life" — rather he uses clichés to describe his desires. He makes an "exhibition" of his sense of justice. When he leaves the scene, the Guard disperses the crowd shouting at them

"All right, all right. Go home! What are you waiting for? The show's over! Go home…"

The Sultan's public appearance, his sense of justice, his plans are all a part of the show. The crowd is the audience for the Sultan. It looks more or less like a scene from the street-theatre. Even after the actors have moved into another part of the city the audience sometimes lingers on and comments on the players and their performance. The Guard's appraisal of the situation is clear and incisive. Just as the Guard judges the situation, in Scene Two, the stepmother sees Sultan as an actor. She laughs at his performance and that is a positive sign of the acting potentiality of the Sultan as an actor. She asks a simple question: "Then what do you do all night?" and the reply is a lengthy, theatrical monologue. Girish Karnad, in his Stage Directions, italicizes the word theatrical. The speech is poetic, stagy and full of grandiose statement:

"Then again I want to climb up, up to the top of the tallest tree in the world, and call out to my people: "Come, my people, I am waiting for you. Confide in me your worries. Let me share your joys. Let's laugh and cry together and then let's pray. Let's pray till our bodies' melt and flow and our blood turns into air. History is ours to play with-ours now! Let's be the light and cover the earth with greenery. Let's be darkness and cover up the boundaries of nations. Come! I am waiting to embrace you all!"

This is not an address in the Durbar, nor is it a king's message to his citizens on his birthday. The scene takes place in a room in the palace. The only person listening to him is the stepmother. So, no wonder, she laughs and tells him: I can't ask a simple question without your giving a royal performance.

The gestures and speech behaviour of Muhammad are theatrical. He plays a "role" now, then changes costumes, and plays another "role". Before Sheikh Imam-ud-din, he plays the role of a true ruler interested in establishing a "new world". He plays it so well Imam-ud-din tells him: "You know, Sultan, I'm just beginning to understand why they saw you are the cleverest main in the world". Scene Six opens with silence. "Muhammad is restless and paces up and down. When the Amirs enter, the restlessness is gone. He welcomes them "with obvious warmth". Every emotion is to be shown. It is an actor's responsibility to make things obvious for the audience, either directly or indirectly. The pensive, restless mood is replaced by an imposed cordiality. Like a skilful actor, Muhammad keeps changing roles. Where there is an opportunity, he becomes theatrical in his action also. In Scene Four, when Shihab-ud-din perceives Muhammad with a mere bow, Muhammad brings in the actor's touch:

That's no way to welcome, Shihab. Come — They embrace.

In Scene Six, when he pleads with Amirs to support him in his plans, much to the surprise and embarrassment of the Amirs, he kneels before them. "The Amirs almost recoil at this sudden gesture". They are taken aback by his theatricality. Like an actor winning applause of the audience by an unexpected gesture, Muhammad outsmarts them. We must remember that Muhammad is aware of the conspiracy of the Amirs at this moment. We are told of his knowledge of the conspiracy only later in the play. So, here is a Sultan, who knows that Amirs have come to kill him and yet stage-manages a "play" before them. He could have easily arrested them in the beginning of the scene itself, but he likes to enjoy the climax of the play, and he would love to exhibit before his audience, how he plays the climax. So he allows the call to prayer. When the Amirs step forward to attack him, the Hindu soldiers overpower them. "While all this is going on, MUHAMMAD goes on praying unconcerned. Only after finishing the prayer does he step down from the throne". In Scene Eight, Muhammad is given a long poetic monologue, which unravels the anguish of a visionary whose vision has fled. He makes the speech dramatic.

In Scene Eight, Muhammad goes to the Fort in search of an audience. He sends for Barani and talks to him. He tells Barani: "When I came here, I felt needed an audience". He is a "demanding companion" to the young watchman. There is a constant desire for an audience.

Another important image that highlights the relationship between life and theatre is "role-playing". Disguise in Tughlaq is a symbol of role-playing. The parallel comic plot of Aziz and Aazam and the main plot converge at one point. Muhammad asks Aziz:

Who are you? How long did you hope to go on fooling us with your masquerade?

Muhammad recognizes a fellow actor in Aziz who is also a genius in "role-playing". When he forgives Aziz, Muhammad says: "I don't know why I am acting like a fool". The various roles played by Aziz — that of a Brahmin, of a victim, and more significantly that of Khalif — are pointers to the fact that Aziz converts life into a stage and goes on with his role-playing. Aziz is Muhammad's "shadow", his "other". He tells Muhammad: "I insist I am your Majesty's true disciple". Aziz checkmates Muhammad and sends him into "a guffaw". He recognizes the genius of Aziz, forgives him and makes him an officer of the State. What is made very obvious in the case of Aziz, is made subtle in the case of Muhammad. Muhammad also wears and disguises himself. There is a basic dialectics in Muhammad's personality: the visionary and the politician; the idealist and the realist. The whole play is a projection of

Muhammad's divided self". The whole play is a projection of Muhammad's "divided self". U. R. Anantha Murthy rightly observes:

"The whole play is structured on these opposites: the ideal and the real; the divine aspiration and the deft intrigue. Tughlaq is what he is in spite of his self. Knowledge and an intense desire for divine grace. He is aware of the irony of his life when Aziz, the only character in the play who has skillfully used all the schemes of Tughlaq for his own designs, kills Ghiyas-ud-din and comes in his guise as a holy messenger of peace to purify the land and revive the banned prayer". ('Introduction of *Tughlaq*'. *Three Plays*, 144-45).

K. S. Ramamurthy also comments on the divided self:

"He is at once an idealist and crafty politician, a humanist and a tyrant, a man who has murdered sleep and yet not a Macbeth haunted by supernatural solicitations, a man who thinks and broods too much and yet not a Hamlet incapable of action or guilty of delay" (Literature Critics, (1979), 17).

The "divided self", pointed out by Anantha Murthy, has to be seen on the stage. To visualize the "divided self" in terms of "role-playing" is a popular English theatrical device. John Osborne does that in Luther. The man behind the revolution is a person in conflict with himself and his parents. Martin's rebellion is a mask that provides him an opportunity to suppress the familial conflict and fight it out in another ground.

In Karnad's Tughlaq, Muhammad is at war with himself. He is basically a visionary, a poet and not a ruler. He loves chess, a rose garden and enjoys reading poems. He reads the Greeks. He is aware of the "Greek in me". He speaks of his visions — of finding a "new world, a world I had not found in the Arabs or even the Koran". He builds a Utopia in his visions. His visions are like "the visions which lead Zarathustra or the Buddha". He is constantly talking about "tomorrow", "a new future". Muhammad tells the young watchman in Scene Eight:

"Nineteen. Nice Age! An age when you think you can clasp the whole world in your palm like a rare diamond. I was twenty-one when I came to Daulatabad first, and built this fort. I supervised the placing of every brick in it and I said to myself, one day I shall build my own history, like this, brick by brick. …Suddenly something happened — as though someone had cast a spell. The torch, the gate, the fort and the sky — all melted and merged and flowed in my blood stream with the darkness of the night. The moment shed its symbols, its questions and answers, and stood naked and calm where the stars throbbed in my veins. I was the earth, was the grass, was the smoke, was the sky".

Barani sees the visionary in Muhammad. He sees him behind the mask. When Muhammad wants to know the cure for the "honey-comb of diseases", Barani prescribes:

"You are a learned man, your Majesty; you are known the world over for your knowledge of philosophy and poetry. History is not made only in statecraft; its lasting results are produced in the ranks of learned men. That's where you belong, your Majesty, in the company of learned men. Not in the market of corpses.

This learned man, the philosopher, Muhammad, speaks through symbols. To him every rose is "an image of Sadi's poems". That is one of the reasons why Muhammad's language is poetic. He has a poet's vision in his heart. He cannot follow Barani's prescription because that means he must give up playing the Sultan:

"I have often thought of that myself-to give up this futile seesaw struggle and go to Mecca. Sit there by the Kaaba and search for the peace, which Daulatabad hasn't given me. What bliss! But it isn't that easy. It isn't as easy as leaving the patient in the wilderness because there's no cure for his disease".

Muhammad feels that he still has "something to give, something to teach, which may open the eyes of history".

Aziz too has his moment of epiphany. He suddenly realizes that human life is just "bodies eaten-up by corruption", like the Sultan's moment of revelation in the rose-garden. Both Aziz and the Sultan suffer identity crisis. The Sultan, a visionary, deliberately dons the robes of a ruler. He kills his father, kills the conspirators and makes Sheik Imam-ud-din a pawn in his game of holding the scepter in his fist. He plays a tyrant but very often the role slips by and makes him a civil servant. The act of forgiveness is the real Sultan. He is a poet who has compassion and a comprehensive vision to tolerate human weakness. But when he plays the Sultan, he kills mercilessly even his close relatives — his father, his stepmother and Shihab-ud-din. The conflict is between the visionary and the ruler and the struggle of Muhammad is to achieve a synthesis between the two. Tughlaq is an excellent tragedy that depicts the struggle and failure of a poet who wants to become a ruler, a visionary who desires to establish a Utopia. The struggle becomes significant as it ends in the failure to affect a synthesis between the poet and the ruler and the failure to found a "new world".

3.4 LET US SUM UP

This play in the main gives us a peep into the nature of power and its relationship with kingship and the people and what happens when power-wielders go awry.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. In what sense is Tughlaq a well-structurred play?
2. What use does Karnad make of the motif of chess?
3. Write a note on the use of the motif of disguise and resemblance in the play?
4. Discuss the theme of power in the play.

UNIT 4 CHARACTERS AND CRITICAL COMMENTS ON THE PLAY

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Characters
4.2 Critical Opinions on *Tughlaq* and its Performances
    4.2.1 *Tughlaq* as a Text
    4.2.2 Play in Performance
4.3 Let Us Sum Up
4.4 Questions
4.5 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will focus on the different characters in the play and bring out their chief characteristic or what has been called the spine. It will also give some idea of how the play has been received in production over time.

4.1 CHARACTERS

Muhammad

So much has been said about Muhammad before. So we are giving only points that could be developed.

1. Muhammad is an idealist and visionary as also a crafty manipulator who will shrink from nothing to acquire power.
2. His idealism goes with a self-righteousness — that only he has the right answers to the problems of the state.
3. His impatience with the people and intolerance with dissent.
4. His view of the people as mere cattle — his increasing alienation from the people.
5. His resorts to violence in order to enforce his will.
   (Add other points that you think have been left out.)

Vazier Muhammad Najib

Najib comes through as an astute politician and master manipulator who is ever-vigilant and whose integrity and loyalty are beyond question. His master moves are: the elimination of the dangerous Sheikh Imam-ud-din and peace with Ain-ul-Mulk. And though nothing is mentioned about his role in quelling the conspiracy against the Sultan, he must have played a major part in it. The Stepmother has him poisoned because she doesn't like his influence on Muhammad. She believes that his kingdom had become 'a kitchen of death — all because of him'. (Scene Ten) But if Muhammad is to be believed, '[Najib] had been advising him against violence. He wanted him 'to hold back [his] sword for the stability of the throne'.

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It could be said that in spite of what the Stepmother says, in his death the Sultan lost a loyal, clear-eyed politician who could manage the affairs of the state in a sensible way.

Stepmother

Muhammad's Stepmother brings a touch of femininity to an otherwise all-male world of the play. Muhammad's relationship with his Stepmother is quite strong and intimate. She is solicitous about his welfare and is worried about his late nights — that he doesn't sleep as much as he should. And he shares his vision of a mystical union with his people with her. (Scene Two)

She doesn't like Muhammad's predilection for violence and attributes it to the growing influence of Vizier Najib on Muhammad. She consults with Barani to exercise his restraining influence on her son and gets a promise from him never to desert his Sultan. She waits for a while after which she has him poisoned.

Muhammad's reaction to the murder of his trusted lieutenant shows how fragile his ties are even with those he loves ('…I love you more than I have loved anyone in my life'.) (Scene Ten) He suspects that her Stepmother also wanted power for herself — a sort of a rival centre of power, and he couldn't tolerate any rival. The only language that he knows to deal with dissent is violence. So the punishment that he gives her is the worst that he can give her — punishment for adultery, which is death by stoning. How intimate his feelings are is clear from his great need to pray and his inability to do it ('I was trying to pray — but I could only find words learnt by rote which left no echo in the heart'.) (Scene Ten) For the first time perhaps we have a feeling for the genuineness of Muhammad as a human being.

Since Muhammad is still single and since his father and brother are already dead, the Stepmother's death signifies the drying up of the springs of human affection in him.

Zia-ud-din Barani (Pronounced Barni)

The presence in the play of Zia-ud-din Barani who was a historian at the court of Muhammad Tughlaq, presents the point of view of a critical insider who has watched the events taking place from a ringside seat and who's both sympathetic and detached. In Muhammad's Stepmother's words, he is 'a sober man, … level-headed and honest'. (Scene II: 160) She adds significantly that he (The Sultan) needs friend like him. Though Barani promises her never 'to leave him-ever-whatever he does', a time comes when his mother dies in the food riots raging in the country and he uses the opportunity to quit. His departure is the departure of the last of the faithfuls and is·a signal for the ascention of opportunists like Aziz.

The fact of the matter is that while Barani is a friend of the Sultan — The latter counts him among the three friends he can trust, the other to being Najib and the Stepmother (Scene Ten: 204), he is neither consulted, nor is his advice heeded. Scene two highlights the disjunction between the policies followed by Najib and Muhammad, and the moral values upheld by Barni. The Sultan is faced with the serious problem — one in dealing with the growing rebellion of Sheikh Imam-ud-din and the other to placate Aim-ul-Mulk, who is marching to Delhi with thirty thousand. Barani suggests the old world values of patience and magnanimity and even offers to go as an envoy to Ain-ul-Mulk to sort out any misunderstanding that there may be. But Najib and Muhammad have other ideas.

Read this exchange

Muhammad: So, Najib, what do you propose?

Najib: I can't think of anything right now. Your Majesty — except that the Sheikh has a striking resemblance to you. (Muhammad, startled, stares at Najib)

Barani: What has the Sheikh got to do with this?

Muhammad: (slowly) you are a devil, Najib! (Pause. The briskly)

Good. We'll think about that. In the meantime, the army should be ready to march. Will start for Kanauj the day of tomorrow in the evening?

Muhammad: forgive me if I let you down, Barani, but I must play this game my own way …. (Scene Two: 159-60)

Going 'my own way' — here means resorting to deception and murder. A mere glance from Najib's is enough to tell Muhammad of the plot Najib is hatching to get rid of Sheikh Imam-ud-din — to exploit the resemblance between the Sultan and the Sheikh and to have the latter killed. Najib and Muhammad's plans are not immediately clear to Barani but he knows that something sinister is afoot and he is horrified: What's all this, your Majesty? I can't follow a thing. But my heart tremble for you.

Muhammad whose courage, honesty and justice; he had praised sometime before is compelled to own up: "Forgive me if I let you down Barani, but I must play this game my own way".

The gap between profession and actual practice is appalling. Here and elsewhere in the play Barani is best seen as a benchmark for political morality.

Barani is naturally very discrete in his comments and criticism and never offers advice unsought. But when his advice his sought, he can be very forthright. When Muhammad asks him for a remedy for the diseased polity, he suggests abdication — a remedy that Sheikh Imam-ud-din had also suggested more indiscreetly.

"History is not made only in state craft; its last time result are produced in the ranks of learned men. That's where you belong. Your Magesty, in the company of learn at men. Not in the market of corpses." (Scene Eight: 195)

Later we reminds him of his earlier idealistic days:

Your Majesty, there was time when you believed in love, in peace, in God. What was happen to those ideals? …….. Why this bloodshed? Please stop it, and I promise your Majesty something better will emerge out of it (Scene Eight: 196)

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Barani remains free for bitterness till the very end of his stay in Tughlaq's scot even when his own mother is killed in the food riots. He just wants to go away — for good and he does.

There is one occasion when Barani becomes really furious — as he listens to Aziz "tale of his criminal rise and prescribes the harshest punishments for him. But ironically Tughlaq himself belongs to the devils league and he knows it. So who will punish whom?"

Barani describes himself as 'a humble historian'. He is a historian but his also a moral presence in the play.

Sheikh Imam-ud-din

Sheikh Imam-ud-din is the Sultan "most vehement critic. He considers him to be incompetent, says that he is a disgrace to Islam and most of all that he has forfeited the right to rule by murdering his father and brother at prayer.

The Sheikh is apparently a brilliant orator and his inflammatory speeches have caused a riot in Kanpur. He has now become the backbone of rebels and his presence in Delhi is obvious a cause for great alarm to Najib and Muhammad. He is tough nut to crack as can be seen in Scene Three.

However for all his toughness, Sheikh Imam-ud-din is not able to see through the designs of the Sultan. In a clever move the Sultan tries to clip his wings by openly asking all Delhi to come and listen to him but privately sending his soldiers to homes to prevent the people from going to the meeting. The result is that there is no one to listen to the Sheikh — non except the Sultan.

But this is only a trailor to the real drama that unfolds later. The Sultan is able to successfully to persuade the Sheikh to go to Ain-ul-Mulk as his envoy of peace by appealing to him in the name of avoiding shedding of Muslim blood. The essentially simple minded Sheikh falls into his trap and goes on the peace mission. There is a melle, he is mistaken for the Sultan and he gets hilled. This resemblance was what Najib and Muhammad had banked on.)

Sheikh Imam-ud-din comes through as a fearless critic who minces no words to tell the Sultan the truth about himself.

Shihab-ud-din

Shihab-ud-din is the Prince of Sampanshahr and could be called the reluctant leader of the conspiracy against the Sultan.

He has come to Delhi at the invitation of the Sultan to look after the administration along with Najib during the Sultan absence. This invitation is meant to be a move to mollify the Princes father.

Shihab-ud-din himself has no grievance against the Sultan nor any personnel ambition. Though he is requested by the rebellious Amirs and is egged on by his adopted brother Sardar Ratansingh to lead the conspiracy he remains reluctant to do so till almost the very end. In fact he has words of praise for the Sultan:

But he has done a lot of good work. Built schools, roads, hospitals. He has made good use of the money. (Scene five: 174)

For the Amir's he has nothing but content:

Come, Ratansingh, let's go. This is worse than I thought: They don't deserve to kiss the hem of the Sultan's dress (175).

He agrees only when Sheikh Shihab-ud-din appeals to him in the name of Islam:

Sheikh:	'will you only think about yourself, Shihab-ud-din'? You are the strong, the powerful in this country. The citizen of Delhi don't wish to go to Daulatabad, but they are weak. Will you do nothing for them? How many people like Sheikh Imam-ud-din have to die before you'll be ready to act? (176)
(No reply)	. . . . . .
Ratansingh:	You accuse the people of Delhi of cowardice and yet you won't raise a finger to correct an obvious wrong………
Amir:	You must help us, Shihab-ud-din
Sheikh:	Islam needs your help. (Scene Five: 176-77)

Though Shihab agrees, he continues to have misgivings till the end: ……All right, let's get down to the details. We have to work everything out carefully. (Suddenly). Must we do this, Ratan, must we? (179)

All this comes to nothing, however the irony is that Shihab-ud-din himself becomes a victim of a private conspiracy engineered by his own adopted brother Ratansingh. He informs the Sultan about the plan of the rebels. This is his vengeance for the death if his father by Shihab.

Though Shihab is a traitor, his death will be mourned as the death of a martyr who died fighting the rebels. This shows how even the dead are not free from politics.

Aziz

Aziz is one of the most absorbing figures in the play. Starting as a dhobi from Shiknar, his spectacular rise to power and position betokens an revocable moral decline and chaos in Tughlaq regime at the end of the play.

Aziz is a rank of opportunists who exploits all the schemes of Tughlaq to his own advantage. In this process he resorts to masquerade, minting coins, robbery, murder and blackmail. In all these activities his constant though reluctant partner is Aazam who has been a small time pickpocket.

In the beginning Aziz is just interested in making money of more money. When in scene one the Sultan announces the brotherhood of all religions and showcases a decision in favour of a brahmin against the state as an example of it, we find that the winner is Aziz masquerading as a brahmin. Later he shifts to the more lucrative business of minting newly introduced copper coins and still later to farming and collecting farm subsidy.

At one stage he and his friend had the job of shifting corpses of the rebels executed by the state and hanging them up for exhibition filled with straw.

Money doesn't satisfy the ambitious for long, however. As Bertrand Russell suggests in his Power: A New Social Analysis; "when a moderate degree of comfort is a sort, both individual and communities will pursue power rather than wealth"

This proves to be true for Aziz who now wants power. Instead of money. In scenes seven we see Aziz already cherishing dreams of joining politics:

"Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world — politics. My dear fellow, that's where our future is — politics! It is a beautiful world — wealth, success, position, power — (190).

In scene nine when they one robbers he is still restless:

Aziz: I am bored stiff with all this running and hiding. You rob a man, you run, and hide. It's also pointless. One should be able to rob a man and then stay there to punish him for getting robbed. That's called 'class' — that is being a real king! (198)

When the royal guest on way to Daulatabad Ohiyas-ud-din is brought to him bound and a foot, he sees his chance. The royal guest is killed and he puts on the royal robbes and asks Aazam:

'How do I look eh?' The great grandson of the Khalif?
Laugh, you fool, laugh. Celebrate! What are you crying for?
Look, look at the palace doors. They are opening for us Dance,
Dance, you son of an ass ... (201).

When they go to Daulatabad, they are royally received. Even the Sultan is deceived for sometime. What distinguishes Aziz from other criminals is the complete brazenness with which he confesses to every misdeed if his. He claims that he alone understands the Sultan and could be said to be a mirror image of him.

What's more he has the Sultan in a cleft stick. Having welcomed him as a saviour and having bowed before him, the Sultan cannot undo his earlier actions and must now become a part of the high level masquerade. This is the biggest irony in the play. The Sultan who had earlier checkmated Sheikh Imam-ud-din and Ain-ul-Mulk is himself checkmated. He's in a trap for which there is no easy escape.

By the time we reach the end the morality of the play has turned up side down. Tughlaq's high moral ground that he held in the beginning is long gone. All his noble dreams lie in a shambles. He is in fact conniving at an importure that is ceremonial in value without any substance whatsoever.

Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid

Ghiyas-ud-din is a descendant of the Abbasid Khalifs who are supposed to be the last of the Khalifs.

He has been invited by the Sultan to come and bless the land by his holy presence. As he says in scene Six, he is 'turning to tradition and history now and seeking an answer there — in the blessings of the Abbasid Khalifa'. (181) This can be seen as an attempt, even a desperate attempt, by the Sultan to use a symbolic religious figure to consolidate his hold on the people.

But Ghiyas-ud-din turns out to be a poor symbol and even this travesty of a symbol falls into the hands of the murderess duo — Aziz and Aazam and gets killed. So what we have by way of the visit of Ghiyas-ud-din in Daulatabad is the mockery of a holy visit by Aziz and his lieutenant. Significantly the imposture is discovered by Hindu women who had lost her child because of Aziz long before it is done by the Sultan.

4.2 CRITICAL OPINIONS ON *TUGHLAQ* AND ITS PERFORMANCES

4.2.1 *Tughlaq* as a Text

Girish Karnad himself has drawn attention to several features of the play: its contemporary relevance, the structuring of scenes and the influences on him. This was in 1971 in an interview with Rajinder Paul for Enact. Later that year in his brief introduction to the play for the OUP edition of three plays of Karnad's U.R. Ananthamurthy was all praise for the play: It had 'an interesting story, intricate plot, scope for spectacle, and uses dramatic conventions like the comic pair Aziz and Aazam (the Akara and Makara of Natak performances), to which theatre audiences respond easily'.(143) Following Girish Karnad himself, Ananthamurthy also refers to the play as a political allegory but the primary interest for him lay in what he called 'the ambiguities of Tughlaq's character'. He also drew attention to the motif of 'prayer' in the play and shows how the play is built round opposites — 'the ideal and the real, the divine inspiration and the deft intrigue'. He points out that the irony in the emergence of Aziz who after murdering Ghiyas-ud-din comes as a holy messenger of peace is deeply tragic.

G.H.Nayak in his article entitled Karnad's Tughlaq (Enact 193-94, Jan-Feb 1983) says that the play provides 'insights into the universal truth concerning the relationship that exists or takes shape between Power and Man'.

Tughlaq has been compared to western plays. M.N.Naik's essay on 'The Limits of Human Power' compares and contrasts it to Camus's Caligula. (Studies in Indian English Literature: 1983) Ashis Sengupta has compared Arthur Miller's play The Ride down Mount Morgan and Tughlaq as political allegories. (Notes and Queries, Vo.9, May 2005)

Aparna Dharwadker used Tughlaq (1964) 'to chart the complex textual and cultural ramifications of postcolonial historical fictions'. (PMLA Jan 1995).

Ashis Sengupta has also written an insightful essay on 'Being and Role-Playing: Reading Girish Karnad's Tughlaq in Indian Literature, Jan-Feb 2003.

Psychiatrist Dr. K.A. Ashok Pai with whom Girish Karnad made the television serial 'Antaral' has drawn attention to the depth of psychological understanding of the behaviour of his characters displayed in Karnad's plays. Karnad's plays, he says, possess the potential for interpreting them as examples of psychoanalytical studies in human behaviour. He cites the examples of Yayati, Hayavadana, Tughlaq and his 2005 play A Heap of Broken Images. When during the course of an interview with the writer, Dr Pai asked him if he agreed with the view that the fragmented image seems to be his metaphor for the human personality, this is what he said: 'It was only when I wrote my third play that I became conscious that certain themes recurred in my play or (since I didn't invent the plots) certain themes seemed to stimulate me — themes with the "Double" as the central motif'. According to Dr Pai, Tughlaq is 'a case study of split personality representing the deep-rooted dualities of human nature'.(Newsletter: The Indian Psychiatric Society, Karnatak State Branch, No.9, May 2005)

There has been a dissenting voice also. The noted Kannada novelist S.L.Bhyrappa has accused Karnad of being untrue to history in order to curry favour with the establishment. It seems there was a controversy about his depiction of Tippu Sultan in his play The Dreams of Tippu Sultan in the Kannada newspaper Vijayakarnataka. But nothing much has come of it.

Tughlaq has been acclaimed both critically and in performance.

4.2.2 Play in Performance

Written in Kannada in 1964, it was first produced at the Indian National Theatre at Bombay in Kannada in 1965. There was another Kannada production at Delhi at Kannada Bharati under B.V. Karanth (1966). The same year the play was produced in Urdu by Om Shiv Puri for the National School of Drama. Om Shivpuri played Tughlaq.

Girish Karnad was persuaded to translate it into English by Alyque Padamsee and the English translation was first staged by the latter for his Theatre Group at the Bhulabhai Auditorium Bombay in 1970. The production was a major success. Later the play was produced by Ebrahim Alkazi for the NSD in 1972 and later in 1974 and 1982 also. The last production was in London. Arun Kuckreja produced it for Ruchika in Delhi in 1975.

Tughlaq in Marathi translation by Vijay Tendulkar was performed in 1971 and later and in Shyamanad Jalan's Bengali translation in Calcutta also.

The play is available in Kannada, Hindi-Urdu, Marathi, Bengali, Gujarati and English editions.

A few words about some of the performances would be in order here. The impact, says Rajinder Paul of the 1966 production of Om Shivpuri, was 'quite tremendous'. Alkazi's production of the Urdu version at the NSD's open-air theatre in 1972 came with a new cast. Shivpuri's set had a historical and architectural resemblance to the period. It also had massive platforms, steps and arches, and the tall Shivpuri in the tailor-made role of Tughlaq. Alkazi had Manohar Singh as Tughlaq. 'Alkazi depends a lot, in this play on spectacle. Amal Allana's costumes are just breathtakingly beautiful'. Alkazi also physicalized the entire direction. 'There is a lot of pulling, muscling and manhandling of and between actors. I liked it quite a lot — the whole action sinking into the growing sadism of Tughlaq — death and killing come to Tughlaq as naturally as metaphors to a poet'. (Enact, May 1973) Naseerudin played Aazam and Uttara Baokar the Stepmother.

Alyque Padamse who produced *Tughlaq* for the Theatre Group in English in Bombay in 1970 recalled his production some 24 years later, describing it as 'a play of enormous stature'. Kabir Bedi, then 24, who had impressed him with 'his stage presence and his magnificent voice' was cast as Tughlaq. The play became what Padamsee called 'the biggest sensation on the English stage, with queues of teenagers waiting for Kabir's autograph at the door backstage'. (*The Independent*, 23 Feb 1994) Alyque's innovation consisted of a prologue that showed "'man –a bare forked creature' standing nude with his back to the audience in a solo spotlight. He is dressed in the royal robes of the monarch and finally turns to face the audience, fully clad as the Emperor Tughlaq. This clued in the audience to my interpretation of Tughlaq turning from a young callow youth into a mythic figure."

Arun Kuckreja's production of the play in December 1975 was not just a dusty page of history but 'a play about the basic questions of our own times'. That was why it was produced so close to the audience at the Triveni Garden. 'At Triveni he created the atmosphere of an arena by placing the audience on three sides of the area usually intended for seating….The action took place in front of this but spread out on occasion to include the parapet on the left and the verandah on the first floor of the Triveni building'.

Another production worth recalling is Arvind Gaur's direction of the play for Asmita in the Sri Ram Centre Basement in April 1994. Ebraham Alkazi had 'given Tughlaq a very grand historical scale full of the glitter of old traditions and costumes, by staging it in for the first time in Delhi's Old Fort'. Gaur dispensed with fancy sets and props and concentrated on bringing out the contemporaneity of the play: 'to draw comparisons between the social, economic and political situation of a period as old as 88 years ago and of our modern times'. 'The plot highlights the clash between power, politics and religion in which neither side gains, and a third party is left with an opportunity to exploit the situation. This party has neither any morals nor any vision of life. It is also thoroughly materialistic and coupled with degenerate values, represents a true picture of our modern times'. What impressed one about the production was the honesty of the actors and the director in focusing on the characters, rather than the externals of technical support.

Try Play Reading

What you as a student can do is of course to see the play if possible. But if for some reason a performance is out of reach, create your own performance. You can do it by getting two or more of your friends together, choosing a scene that you particularly like and reading it out as you think the lines should be read. This exercise will help you to come near to the heart of the play. Play-reading can be a very exciting activity.

4.3 LET US SUM UP

Tughlaq is a deeply absorbing study of one of the most enigmatic figures in medieval history. As a play it is both brutally objective and deeply sympathetic. The commentaries and the questions raised in the course of the scene-wise analysis of the play have, I hope, helped you to discover the fascinating character of the Sultan — his love for power, his idealism and his self-imposed mission for the people, which co-existed 'with his impatience, his cruelty and his feeling that he had the only correct answer'.

A final word about Girish Karnad's achievement

Karnad's great achievement lies in re-interpreting the country's past, both its myth and folktales and history, to comment on matters of contemporary interest and also offer insights on human condition in general.

When asked what his legacy would be, he said: 'I am happy to belong to a generation that had a Dharma Vir Bharati, a Mohan Rakesh, a Vijay Tendulkar, and I. Together we can claim that we did create a national theatre for modern India'. (*India Today*: 12 April, 1999)

4.4 QUESTIONS

1. 'There was synthesis of opposing extremes in the character of Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq'. Comment
2. What are the causes for the failure of Sultan Muhammad?
3. "People did not understand Sultan Muhammad as his ideas were in advance of his times". Do you agree with the statement?
4. Write a note on the contemporary relevance of *Tughlaq*.
5. Discuss the relevance of Aziz-Aazam episodes in the play.
6. Do you find the episode of Muhammad stabbing Shihab-ud-din repeatedly even after he was dead revolting? Was it dramatically necessary? Discuss.

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